

THE
GREATNESS
OF THE
DIVINE LOVE

VINDICATED:
In Three LETTERS.

- I. Concerning the Possibility of our common Salvation,
- II. Concerning the Importance of a firm Belief of it.
- III. Concerning God's absolute Decrees of the actual Fall and Misery of Men and Angels.

By *SAMUEL FANCOURT.* K

Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,
Dan. xii. 4.

Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.
Hos. vi. 3.

L O N D O N:

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GREYATNESS

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DIVINE LOVE

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In Three Letters

- I. Concerning the Beauty of our common Saviour
- II. Concerning the Beauty of a true Believer
- III. Concerning the Beauty of the Church



THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE

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LONDON

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T H E

P R E F A C E.

CANDID READER,

THE design of the following letters is to prove, That there is help for all in God; and that sin and destruction are from the creature only. The decrees and foreknowledge of God have been urg'd to overturn this wholesome and comfortable doctrine. I have endeavour'd therefore to rescue them out of the hands of the oppugners of our common salvation. If I have dar'd in this attempt to step out of the usual path, in some things, it is only from a zeal for the moral perfections of God; and that I might the better maintain the truth and honour, the harmony and authority of the sacred scriptures. They that can forgive me this one injury, an endeavour to demonstrate, that as we all want help, we may have it, will forgive me the whole. This is the gospel I am contending for, and am content to bear the reproach of. Tho' I may differ in this from some who are truly humble and serious, yet let the fervency of our mutual love appear in bearing with one another. Since as to tell sinners, they want help, but can't have it, can do no man any good;
so

iv The P R E F A C E.

so to tell them, they want help, and may have it, can do no one any hurt.

Shou'd any think it worth their while to remark upon what I have wrote, it may be proper to let them know before hand, that I shall regard no arguments but what are groundd upon scripture or reason; nor shall I think such remarkers worth my notice, that appear either so weak they cannot, or so perverse that they will not understand what I have said; or that shew a manifest disposition to quarrel rather than to argue, or to expose the author rather than his cause. It may be reasonably expected also, they shou'd not be ashamed of their names; nor satisfy themselves to carp and object here and there; but that they fairly enter the lists with me, confute my arguments, and establish a more honourable and consistent scheme of thoughts, than that which I have here laid down.

The doctrine of reprobation has been matter of infinite scandal to Christianity, and particularly to the tenets of Calvin. Now, if I have suggested anything that may extricate his followers out of this Labyrinth, so as yet to preserve the rest, I have only consulted the reputation and spread of all that's valuable in their scheme, viz. the truths that are amiable and sanctifying, and ought to be esteem'd a friend to our common christianity, and no enemy to them: which under all the indignities I may meet with, shall, I trust, be the unfeigned endeavour of him, who is 4 OC 58.

Yours in all christian services,

S. F.

(1)

THE
GREATNESS
OF THE
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VINDICATED, &c.

LETTER I.

SIR,

YOUR repeated importunities, join'd with other reasons, have at length prevail'd with me to send you my *publick thoughts* upon the following words, as they relate to the possibility of our common salvation.

"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help."

Whether the *destruction* mention'd here, was at the writing of this prophecy, actually upon the *Israelites*, or only over them, is not very material. It was then *sure* and *certain*, without timely repentance: and it is not unusual, in the *prophetick style*, to speak of such events as *present*. The great design of the Spirit in the words is plain, which is to point out the *guilty cause* of

* Hosea xiii. 9.

the calamity, and to direct them to the proper remedy. Say, that the words have a more immediate reference to the loss of Canaan, but then Canaan is here consider'd as a type of Heaven. The land of promise shadows out the new heavens, and the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. Besides, if the temporal destruction of sinners is from themselves, much more that which is eternal: And if they have offered help in God, as to the ruin that threatens them in this world, much more with regard to the wrath to come. And indeed, if the argument be good, O Israel, thou hast destroy'd THY SELF; therefore thy fathers have not destroy'd thee: If the supposition of the one overturns the other; it must equally follow, that since they had destroy'd themselves, their then present destruction could not be charg'd upon Adam neither. We, thro' grace, stand upon our own bottom; are under a possibility of salvation; and now the soul that sins shall die. If we die eternally, we die by our own hands. Whatever the case would have been without a remedy, yet as the matter now stands, the guilt of our destruction will lie at our own door.

They are both extremes, either to think that sinners want not help; this is to consider man as not destroy'd, to represent him rather as an innocent than fallen creature, and is rank Pelagianism: or, to imagine that tho' they want help, yet it can't be had; this is to consider such as utterly lost, as in the state of devils; and is gross Antinomianism. But to conceive of sinners as those that want help, and may have it, is to treat them as in a state of trial, as under a dispensation of grace; and is what I take to be, plain Christianity. ^b For God sent not his son into the world

^b John iii. 17.

TO CONDEMN *the world*, but that *the world thro' him might be saved*. Say, that God is able to help us, yet if he is not willing, still there is *no help* for us in God. And yet he that can help us, but keeps his help *without our reach*, can never be said to be *willing* to help us. *Help* that is not to be had, is *no help*: Or, *help* that is to be had only by those that *come*, if they cannot come, is yet *no help*. And yet if we can neither come *without God's hand*, nor *come at his hand* to draw us, we cannot come: So that still there is *no help*, no hope. This help, you'll say, will be accepted only by *some*, and not by *all*. What then? Had there not been help *provided for all*, as well as for *some*, it would never have been said unto *Israel in general*, *In me is your help*. And indeed an *help* that is not *by name* tender'd to any, must be tender'd to *all*, or it is tender'd to *none* at all, *i. e.* it is not *so tender'd*, as that any, upon their acceptance of the offer, can claim a right unto the help that's offered,

Perhaps you'll say, we allow there is help in God for *Israel*, for those that are *Israelites* indeed, God's *chosen* ones: But what is this to *rebellious Israel*, to those that are *Jews* according to the *flesh* only? I answer, should it be *supposed*, but not *granted*, that by *Israel* here, the *elect* only are intended; yet how can it be truly said, *These* have destroy'd *themselves*, if it was never in *their power* to have *prevented* their destruction. Besides, will any say, Tho' the *elect* part of *Israel* did destroy *themselves*, or were destroy'd by *their own fault*; yet the *rest* were destroy'd of God, or by *others*, *i. e.* were destroy'd without their own fault? But the truth is this, as *Israel* is sometimes taken for those who are not *chosen*; *v. g.* What then? *Israel* hath not obtain'd
that

that which he seeketh for, but the election hath obtained it ^c; so nothing is more plain, than that by *Israel* here, are meant the people of the *Jews* in general; or at least, in opposition to *Judah*, those rebellious *ten tribes* that revolted from the house of *David*, and clave to *Jeroboam*; *Thou* *ISRAEL* *play the harlot*, yet let not *JUDAH* offend ^d. It was the degenerate part of the *Jews*, even those of whom the prophet thus complained, ^e *I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel, there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled.* And again, ^f *Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.* It was (I say) degenerate *Israel*, to whom God declares, *Thou hast destroyed thy self, but in me is thine help.* And this was one proof, or evidence, that their destruction was of themselves, *In that HELP was to be HAD in God, and they REFUS'D it.*

Why shou'd it be grievous unto any to hear, that God is ready to help them? Since if it be not so, all must wish it was so. Sure I am, *this is the Gospel*, every one wou'd chuse for himself, wou'd chuse for his brother, and for a lost world. To be told, you are destroy'd by another's sin, and yet there is *no help* to be had against this destruction: Or, that you have destroy'd *your self*, and in God there is help indeed; but it is *such help* as after all that you *can* do, you never *shall*, never *can* be the better for: Wou'd not this be far worse to you, than the hand-writing that *Belshazzar* saw upon the plaister of the wall of the kings palace? ^g And wou'd it not make thy countenance to change, thy thoughts to trouble thee, the joints of thy loins to be loosed,

^c Rom. xi. 7. ^d Hosea iv. 15. ^e Ibid. vi. 10. ^f Ibid. x. 1.
^g Dan. v. 5, 6.

and thy knees to smite one against another? Why then shou'd any be *displeas'd*, if I can prove to them, that tho' God be their *adversary*, yet he *may be* their *friend*, if it be not *their own fault*? Or for exhorting them, ^h *To agree with this adversary quickly, while they are in the way with him?*

Was it really an *error*, it must be allow'd to be a very *harmless* error. As to tell men, *They WANT help, but CAN'T have it*, can do no man any good; so to tell them, *They WANT help, and MAY have it*, can do no man any hurt. It can neither injure the *elect*, nor those that are *not elected*. *Salvation* will be never the less *sure* and *certain* unto God's *chosen*, because the door was open unto *others* also: Nor will the *perdition* of *others* be the *more excusable*, because *salvation* was what they *might* have had, but *wou'd not*. It is not a doctrine that tends either to *despair* or *licentiousness*, but rather to that *hope* which *purifies*; and sets the *divine being* in a *more lovely* view. Besides, if it be not properly *our fault*, that we are *faulty*, then who can blame *me*, tho' I *err*; or tho' I *propagate* my error? *Adam* is the only *criminal*. Let the error be what it will that you or I do *utter*; they are *our organs* indeed, but it is *Adam's crime*. Neither can any be *corrupted* by our errors, that were not under a *necessity*, by their first parents fall, to embrace them. For to suppose that they are not *necessarily* erroneous, is to suppose that the error is *their own*; and if *destructive*, that the destruction is of *themselves*; which the opposers of this doctrine will by no means allow.

The disposition to *monopolize* salvation, to engross the offers of saving help, as if it was the

^h Matt. v. 25.

peculiar, or the privilege of some few, was very prevalent in the Apostles days. ⁱ *I take you to record this day, (says Paul to the church of Ephesus) That I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunn'd to declare unto you ALL the counsel of God.* There was, it seems, some part of the counsel of God, concerning our redemption, so contrary to the pride and prejudice of some of his hearers, that (had he consulted flesh and blood, his carnal ease) he shou'd have been tempted to have shunn'd the preaching of it: Which yet was of that importance unto sinners to know, that to have concealed it from them, wou'd have been to have drawn upon himself the guilt of their blood; wou'd have made him a guilty party in the destruction of their souls. Now, wou'd you know, what branches of the divine counsel Paul was under such a temptation to have shunn'd the declaration of? Why, they were chiefly two, 1st. That salvation was to be had by the Gentiles, or was offer'd unto them, as well as unto the Jews. 2^{dly}. That Christ Jesus, whom the Jews did crucify, was the author of this salvation. ^k *He taught them PUBLICLY, and FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, testifying both to the JEWS, and also to the GREEKS, repentance towards God, and FAITH towards OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.* It was for this gospel he had suffered, and was shamefully entreated at Philippi; and which he tells the Thessalonians he was bold in God to speak unto them with much contention. *For as we were allowed of God, says he, to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as PLEASING MEN, but GOD, &c.* Some, it seems, wou'd have been even pleased, had he confined salvation to the

ⁱ Acts xx. 26, 27. ^k Acts xx. 19, 20, 21.

Jews, and had he spoke of the *Gentiles* as a *lost people*; as *others* took pleasure in despising the *author* of salvation, as if he had been a *deceiver*, and not the *Lord of glory*. But *Paul* chose rather to please *God* than *man*; and rather, with just and devout *Simeon*, to say, *1 Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of ALL people; a light to lighten the GENTILES, and the glory of thy people Israel*. But now a salvation so prepared before the face of all people, as that it is not possible to be had by them; and yet for their not having of which they shall be punish'd with a greater damnation, *This is THE condemnation: A salvation, I say, so prepared, wou'd have been such a light, as the Gentiles wou'd have been ready to have deem'd darkness; and such a glory as the people of Israel wou'd have had too much cause to have been ashamed of. A gospel upon impossible terms is but the name without the thing*. But to tell sinners that as they are in circumstances that need the *divine help*, so (during this day of their visitation) they are in circumstances too, in which it may be had; or that they are not to be destroy'd by their first parents fall, but that they may escape destruction, if they do not also destroy themselves: This is indeed good tidings of great joy and worthy to be preached unto all people, according to our Lord's commission, *m Go ye into ALL THE WORLD, and preach the gospel to EVERY CREATURE: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned*. This is the blessed hope that the gospel hath brought to light; and that it behoveth every Church, and every member therein to be-

¹ Luke ii. 31, 32. ^m Mark xvi. 15, 16.

lieve, to hold forth, and to maintain. " If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preach'd unto every creature which is under heaven, whereof I Paul am made a minister. The faith, the hope (you see) which they were (wou'd they be unreprouvable) to continue in, and of which Paul was made a minister, were that faith and hope which belonged unto every creature, every rational creature, which was under heaven. Peace on earth [the offer of peace unto the whole earth] good-will towards man [God's willingness to be, in Christ, reconciled to all men] is that glory to God in the highest, which was the blessed subject of the angel's song, at our Saviour's birth.

So that the proposition that arises from the whole, and which, for order sake, I shall make the foundation of what I have further to say, is this:

It is of great importance unto sinners firmly to believe, that they have destroy'd themselves; and yet that in God they have offered help.

In this proposition there are several branches that deserve a distinct consideration; as, that we are really destroy'd; that we have destroy'd ourselves; that God is able to help us; that he is ready to help us; and that it is of great importance to be firmly persuaded, both of our self-destruction, and of this offer'd help.

First, That we are destroy'd: This is imply'd. Man consider'd as without the help which the gospel brings, is lost. We have lost our right unto life and immortality: The wages of sin is death. We have lost our power to recover this right:

The cherubims and a flaming sword turn'd every way to keep the way of the tree of life, that none might eat and live. Gen. iii. 24. We have lost our disposition unto holiness, as it lies in a love to God and Man ; ^p our carnal minds are enmity against God ; ^a inclin'd to live in malice and envy, hateful and bating one another. We have lost our power to recover, without the divine help, this disposition for holiness: As the carnal mind is not, so neither indeed can it be subject to the law of God. ^d They that are in the flesh cannot please God.

The want of a due conviction, that without the help which the gospel brings, we are lost, will tempt us to despise the remedy it offers as an unnecessary thing; to ascribe salvation to the merit of our own works, and not to the blood of Christ; to deny that in Adam all dy'd; to take up with that for sanctification and holiness, which our natural abilities alone, without the spirit's aid, are capable of; to indulge to pride and self-admiration; and to delay our acceptance of those gracious assistances that wait upon us.

Secondly, As we are destroy'd, so we have destroy'd ourselves. O Israel thou hast destroy'd thyself. As if God had said, I have not destroy'd you; others have not destroy'd you; but as you are destroy'd, so your destruction is of yourselves.

1st. God has not destroy'd us. He can neither compel, nor incline to sin, the guilty cause of our destruction. Sin has neither his command, nor promise, nor so much as his real connivance to countenance it. True; because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore the

^p Rom. viii. 7. ^a Tit. iii. 3. ^d Rom. viii. 7, 8.

heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. But did they duly consider, there is an *eternity* before them for God to shew his *infinite displeasure* against sin in ; that there are *curses* in in the mean while upon record, full charg'd with wrath, and pointed towards the sinner ; and that *abused patience* will *encrease* the condemnation, they would find but small encouragement from the divine forbearance to serve divers lusts and pleasures. Nay, sin is so far from having any *real countenance* from God, that it is the declared *object* of his *hatred* ; it is *opposite* to his *government* ; what he is *active* to *restrain*, and to *destroy* ; what he *pursues* with his judgments in *this world*, and *threatens* with eternal vengeance in the next. Let us therefore guard against any such insinuation, as if God had destroyed us ; it is *false* and *wicked*, *foolish* and *highly provoking* unto his holiness. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God ; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*.

Secondly, As we must not charge our destruction upon God, so neither can we charge it upon others. Indeed by man, by the *first Adam*, came death ; we lost life and immortality by his fall. Yet we must remember also, by man, by the *second Adam*, came the resurrection from the dead. Our blessed Emmanuel hath *abolish'd* death, and brought life and immortality to light thro' the Gospel. The seed of the woman hath *broken* the serpent's head, hath ruined the *destroying* power the devil had obtained by the fall ; has so far ruin'd it, that our *present destruction*

^r Eccl. viii. 11.

^r Jam. i. 13.

^r 1 Cor. xv. 21.

^r 2 Tim. i. 10.

is not the *necessary* effect of our first parents disobedience, but arises from our own *voluntary* and *guilty neglect* of the great salvation. We are put into a *new state of trial*. Life and death, blessing and cursing are again set before us to take our choice. *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you* (says Moses to all Israel) *that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore chuse life* *. So that if we die now, it is not because we *cannot* have life, but because we *won't* have life. Our Saviour therefore lays the *death* of sinners, *not* upon their *weakness*, but upon their *wilfulness*; *Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*. Christ allowed them to be *dead*, and that *without him* they *could not live*: But yet he supposes that they *might come* for life. He had so far consulted their *fallen state*, as to suit his *remedy* unto it; and therefore their *neglect* to come for life, made *death* to be their *own choice*, and their destruction to be of themselves. Say that the *disease* is *hereditary*, derived from the grand parent, and that it is *mortal* in its own nature, tends to death; yet since the *remedy* is *within thy reach*, and it is thy *wilful refusal* that makes it *ineffectual*, thou must blame *thyself*, and not thy *fore-father*, if thou diest of this disease. The sin therefore that is connected with *death*, with *eternal death*, St. James represents as *our own sin*, and not *Adam's*. It is such a sin as our *original corruption* may *entice* us to, but *cannot compel* us to commit. We are *drawn away* of our own lust, and *enticed not forced*. Then, when *lust-bath conceived*, it *bringeth forth sin*; and sin when it is *finish'd*, it *bringeth forth death* †. So that tho' our *lustings* be *originally* from *Adam*,

* Deut. xxx. 19. † John v. 40. ‡ Jam. i. 14, 15.

yet the *sin* that's *deadly*, or for which any man dies *eternally*, is his own work ; therefore still *we* destroy *ourselves*.

And it is a matter so evident and plain, that we die, because we *will* die, that God is free to appeal not only to beholders, but to every man's *own conscience*, whether it be not so. ^a *Why will ye die ?* As if God had said, you shall be your own judges. I challenge you to produce any thing as the *real*, as the *necessary* cause of your death, but because you *will not* have life. And this divine appeal is the more to be regarded, because it is in answer to a wicked insinuation, as if God was treating with them about life upon *impossible terms*. If, say they, ^b *our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live ?* We want the *pardon* of our sin ; but if the *pardon* of sin is *not to be bad*, our sins are *unpardonable* ; *How should we then live ?* Or, we want to be *cleansed* from sin ; but if *grace* to sanctify us is *not to be bad*, our *sanctification* is *impossible* ; *How should we then live ?* But now it is so unworthy of the Divine Goodness and Sincerity to set life before them, but out of their reach ; to *seem* to offer something, and to hold forth nothing, that God gives them not only his *Word*, but his *Oath* to purge himself from so vile a charge. ^c *Say unto them, says God to the Prophet, as I live I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live ; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ?* As if God had said, were the terms of life *impossible*, as your complaint would argue, this would represent me as having plea-

^a Ezek. xxxiii. 11. ^b ——— ver. 10. ^c ——— ver. 11.

sure in the death of the wicked; that it is *my* fault, and *not theirs*, or *my* fault *more* than *theirs*, that they *now* perish in their iniquities and pine away in their sins: But say unto them, as I live, I have *no pleasure* in their death, &c. But I proceed to shew,

Thirdly, That tho' we have destroyed our selves, yet God is *able* to help us. This is the least that is intended. It cou'd in no sense be said, *That in God is our help*, if (as matters now stand) he was *unable* to save us. But when I speak of God's *ability* to help sinners, I wou'd not be understood of a *remote* and *distant* power only, of a meer *natural ability* in God, consider'd as an *almighty* and infinitely *wise being*, to put things into such a state, that we *might* have help: But that there is a more *immediate* and *present* power, such as arises from a due *preparation and disposition* of matters for such a work. Who will say, it is *absolutely impossible* for God to help the very *Devils*? If you consider his power in its *native* strength, as *not limited* by his *purpose*, and *directed* by his *counsels*; we know of no flat *contradiction* in the thing it self. And yet it was never said unto them, O devils, ye have destroy'd yourselves, but in me is your help. Neither would such a declaration have become the *divine wisdom and simplicity*; because there are *no preparations* for such a work, *no dispositions* towards it; but on the contrary, a *peremptory decree*, that let them do what they *will* or *can*, they shall notwithstanding be *reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day*.

But when God is said to be *liable* to help us, my meaning is, there are *magazines* laid up, all *requisite stores* provided. Our *distemper* has been
consulted,

consulted, and a remedy adapted. There is all fulness treasured up in a proper subject, viz. in our blessed redeemer, to answer all our wants and exigences. It is a power at hand, a very present help, calculated for this great time of need. God has laid up in his son merit enough to justify our persons, and to restore our right unto a blessed immortality; and grace enough to sanctify our natures, and prepare us for it.

1st. In the son of God there is merit enough to justify our persons, and to restore our right unto a blessed immortality. This sufficiency of merit in Christ will appear by the appointment and acceptance of his father.

By the father's appointment. Our Lord was by divine designation set apart for this purpose, to take away the curse. He was sent ^d to redeem us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Now had the father appointed an insufficient saviour, one that was not able to have answered the end of satisfying for sin, it must have reflected highly, either upon the integrity of God, as if he had dealt deceitfully with sinners; or upon his wisdom, as if thro' an over-sight he had pitched upon an incompetent person; or upon his omnipotence, as if thro' a defect of power he was unable to qualify our Lord for the great work he had called him to. It appears also to be sufficient

From the divine acceptance. God did not only ordain our Saviour for, but accept him in the work, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am WELL-PLEASED. God had promised that the seed of the woman shou'd break the serpent's head, shou'd countermine the designs of Satan, and

^d Gal. iii. 13. • Mat. iii. 17.

ruin the kingdom he had founded upon *Adam's fall*: He had promised to send that immaculate lamb which wou'd take away the sins of the world; that sacrifice which shou'd answer the demands of justice: which shou'd pacify his anger, and reconcile him to *returning* sinners. Now when he view'd our Lord *possess* of his *office*, surveyed the divine endowments his son was crown'd with for the accomplishment of this gracious enterprize, he smiled upon him, embraced and lov'd him: A full demonstration of our Saviour's sufficiency; [†] or *that the blood of Christ can cleanse us from all sin*. Let thy sins be levell'd against *man* or *God*, against *law* or *gospel*; let them be of *heart* or *life*, of *omission* or *commission*; let them be committed against *light* and *love*, against *purposes* and *vows*; in *contempt* of *divine mercies* or in *defiance* of *God's judgments*; let them run thro' *every part* of *life*, thro' *every duty*, be of what *continuance* or *aggravation* they will; be they never so much extended and swell'd with poisonous malignity, it matters not in point of *despair*; the blood of Christ *can* cleanse you from the guilt of *all*. There is *virtue enough* in the *blood* of *Christ*, the *defect* is not in *that*.

2dly. In Christ there is not only a *fulness* of *merit* to *justify* our *persons*, and to restore our right unto a blessed immortality; but a *fulness* of *grace* also to *sanctify* our *natures*, and to prepare us for it. And in this respect also he appears to be our *able* helper. *Of his fulness*, says *John*, [‡] *HAVE all we received, and grace for grace*. Now from what our Lord *has* done, to what he *can* do, is fair arguing. That Word which in

† 1 John i. 7.

‡ John i. 16.

the beginning was not only with God, but was God; and without whom was not any thing made that was made; he can perform every thing that is not a *contradiction* in itself; or a *reflection* upon divine *perfection*; he can create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us.

So much for the third branch, that God is able to help us; that there is in God a *more immediate* and *present* power, such as arises from a due *preparation* and *disposition* of things for such a work; or, that he has laid help upon one that is *mighty* to save. I come to shew,

Fourthly, That God *offers* us this help. That Israel was *already* destroy'd, or *about to be so*, was very evident; there was no room to deny, or to dispute this. But the question was, Who must bear the *blame*? On whom must the *fault* of their destruction rest? The present generation were for *shifting off* the guilt, and dividing the blame betwixt their *fore-fathers iniquity*, and God's *severity*. ¹ *The fathers have eaten sower grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.* But what says God? *O Israel, thou hast destroy'd thy self.* But now, lest rebellious Israel shou'd reply, *If we have destroy'd our selves; then there is no hope, no; so that tho' we have loved strangers; yet after them will we go;* therefore to meet with this objection, it is immediately added, *But in me is thine help.* Thy case is bad, but it is not desperate. I am *ready* to help thee. Christ is of God made unto us, in the *sincere offers* of the gospel, both *righteousness* and *sanctification*.

1st. We have the offer of a *righteousness* in Christ to help us against the charges of the law. ² *He*

¹ Ezek. xviii. 2.

² Jer. li. 25.

³ 2 Cor. vi. 21.

was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. ¹ He is the end of the law for RIGHTEOUSNESS unto every one that believeth. Our blessed Lord thought nothing too painful, too dear, too valuable, to work out an everlasting righteousness, that he might be able to atone for all guilt, and to merit the sinners acceptance. And can we once imagine that this was done, that the power might lie dormant, and sleeping? Doubtless, he that waded so deep into sorrows, and laid down his very life that he might be qualified to redeem us from the curse, is abundantly ready to communicate the blessings he hath purchased. What he says unto the church of *Laodicea*, he says unto all, ^m I COUNSEL thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou may'st be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.

2dly. We have the offer of strength and grace in Christ to help us against the captivating force and defiling stains of sin. He that was so ready to bear the weight of his father's wrath to deliver us from hell, is not less ready to communicate his sanctifying influences, to fit us for heaven; to the eyes of whose holiness sin is more abominable than hell is formidable. Nay, whilst God doth take delight in the misery of the impenitent, as it is an act of justice upon their rebellion; there is no consideration can possibly reconcile him to sin, but he will be still pursuing it with his implacable hatred, and with eternal vengeance. The apostle teaches us to argue from God's greater benefits to those that are smaller, ⁿ He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, How shall he not with him also freely give us

¹ Rom. x. 4. ^m Rev. iii. 18. ⁿ Rom. viii. 32.

all things! So here, if our Lord was a *willing sacrifice* to save us from sin's curse; shall he not much rather display his omnipotence to *cleanse* us from the *stain* of sin? The exercise of his *active* power is not so grievous, as his being an *offering* for sin, wherein our Lord was *passive*; there must therefore be, if possible, a *much readier* disposition in Christ to be unto us *sanctification* than *righteousness*. But,

Fifthly, As to the *real importance* of a *right belief* concerning our *present malady*, and the *offered remedy*, I wou'd observe; If it shall appear, that it *can't* be any *hurt* unto the *saint* or *sinner*, to believe, *That they have destroy'd THEMSELVES, and yet that they have OFFERED help in God*: But that on the contrary, it is a doctrine according to *godliness*: If it shall appear that such a conviction is an *encouragement* to *faith* and *humility*, to *patience* and *hope*; is a *friend* to *endeavours*; *perswades* us our *actual sins* are truly our own, and *more criminal* in the sight of God than that which is only *imputed* to us, and was committed by our grand parent, if not *against*, at least *without* our *wills*: If this account of our state shall appear to be a *motive* to *divine love*; a *friend* to the *gospel*, to the *spread*, the *study*, and *success* of it; if it best *reconciles* the *language* of *scripture*; gives a *reputation* and *force* to the *threatnings* and *promises* of God; best *vindicates* his *moral character*, as his *holiness*, his *justice*, his *mercy* and *truth*: If it makes it not only a great *duty* to attend upon, but a great *privilege* to enjoy *gospel ordinances*; is an *encouragement* to a *penitential confession* of sin, and to a *fiducial recumbency* on our Saviour; if it rather *guards* than *destroys* the doctrines of *election*, and *perseverance*, and sets the doctrine of *assurance* upon

upon a more *rational* foundation ; if it gives the honour that is due to the *satisfaction* of the son, and to the *sanctifying* operations of the spirit ; and so sheds a *lustre* and a glory upon the *whole oecomeny* of our salvation : If this appears to be the real case, (as I trust it will) it is surely not only a *very harmless*, but a *very important* doctrine ; and worthy to be contended earnestly for, as the *very marrow* of the gospel, that our bible contains.

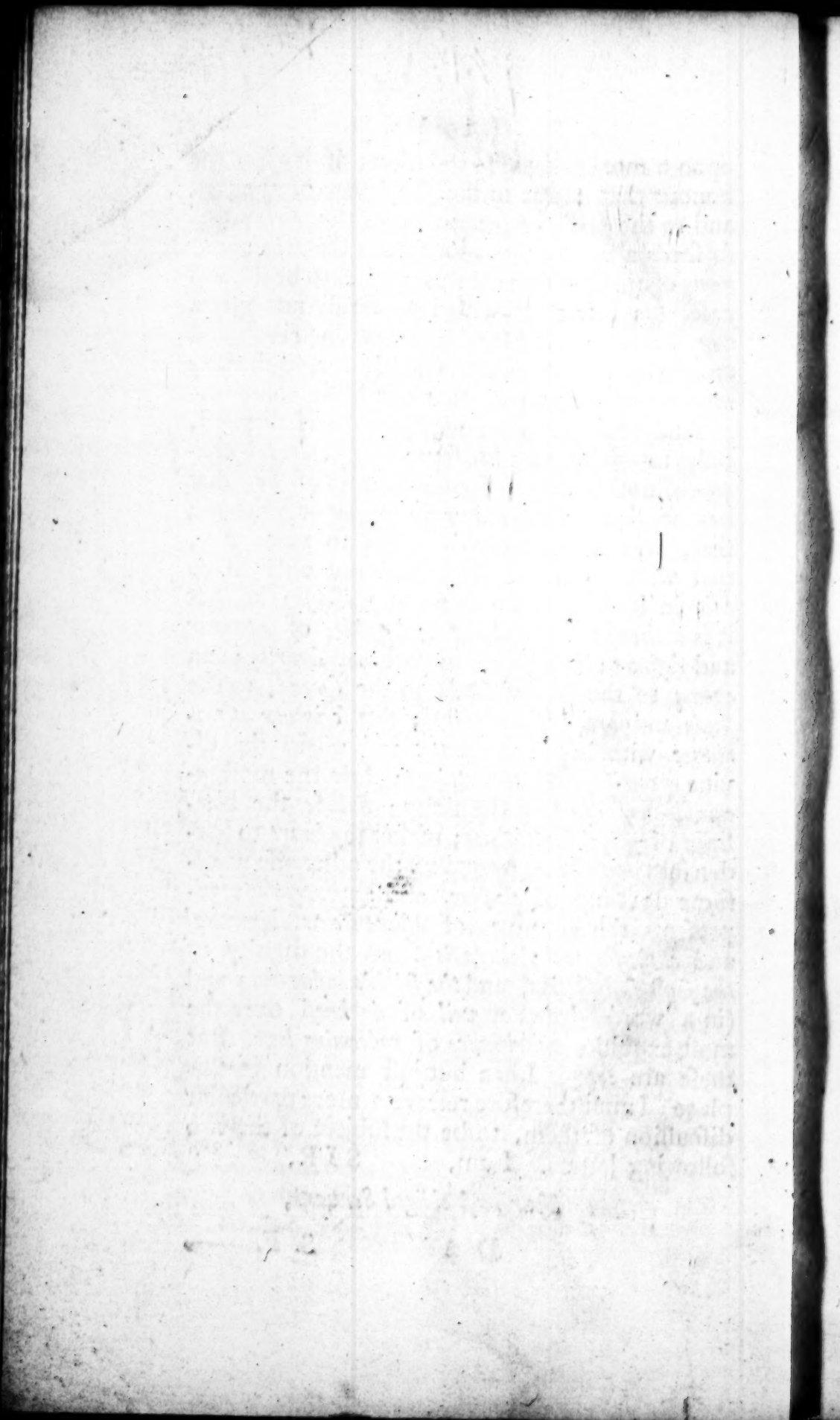
And yet shall it be *disesteem'd* and *slighted*, only to make way for some *indigested* and *antiquated* notion of *necessitating* decrees of *sin*, that has no foundation either in *reason* or *scripture* ; that, was it *true*, can be *useful* to *none* ; nay, that will, perhaps, be found not only to be *false* in itself, but an *enemy* to *godliness* ; in that it is a *cherisher* of *unbelief* and *pride*, of *murmur* and *despair* ; is a *friend* to *sloth* and *security* ; an *enemy* to the *love* of *God* ; to the *spread*, to the *study* and *success* of the *gospel* ; sets *scripture* at *variance* with itself ; *enervates* and *vilifies* the *divine promises* and *threatnings* ; *stabs* the most *amiable* *perfections* of the *deity* ; *nullifies* the *blessings* of *gospel institutions* ; makes the *heart* to *harden* into *impenitency* ; *perplexes* the otherwise *wholesome* *doctrines* of *election*, and *perseverance* ; represents the *comforts* of *assurance* as *chimerical* and *enthusiastical* ; *detracts* from the *dignity* of the *son's satisfaction*, and the *spirit's influences* ; and (in a word) draws a *veil* of *darkness* over the most *exquisite contrivance* of *redeeming love*. But these are *topicks* I can but just mention in this place ; I must therefore reserve a more particular discussion of them, to be the subject of the two following letters. I am,

S I R,

Your most obliged Servant,

D 2

S. F.—



THE
GREATNESS
OF THE
DIVINE LOVE
VINDICATED, &c.

LETTER II.

SIR,

MY principal design, as you will easily observe, is to make out these *two* points; *That the POSSIBILITY of our COMMON salvation is a real TRUTH: And that a firm BELIEF of this truth is a matter of great IMPORTANCE.* The truth of the doctrine I have endeavoured to establish in my first letter: To shew the vast importance of a deep conviction of its truth, will be the business of *this*.

Now its importance will appear, from the manifold *advantages* such a belief brings with it, *That as we need the divine help, so we may have the help that we need.* It is a friend to the *object* of worship; to the *rule* of worship; to the *ordinances* of worship; to the *gospel* in general; to the *two great doctrines* of the gospel in particular; and to the *worshipper* himself.

First, It is a friend to the object of worship.

This

This doctrine, that we have destroy'd *ourselves*, but that in God is *offer'd help*, best vindicates God's *moral* character, as his *holiness*, his *justice*, his *mercy*, and *truth*.

Strip the divine being of his *moral* perfections, and you strip him of his Godhead; you disrobe him of his *peculiar* glory: You make him *great* but *frightful*, *powerful* but *formidable*, an object of our *dread* but not of our *love*. The *spirituality* of his *essence*, the *infinity* of his *presence*, the *eternity* of his *duration*, the *unchangeableness* of his *nature*, the *unsearchableness* of his *knowledge*, the *absoluteness* of his *dominion*, and the *uncontroulableness* of his *power* may make him the *terror* of all worlds; but they are his *holiness* and *righteousness*, his *mercy* and *truth*, must make God our *delight* and *trust*. Therefore to be prodigal of the honour of these *amiable* perfections is to injure God in a very tender point, and must be highly provoking. The doctrines then that best guard and illustrate these *divine* excellencies, that denominate him *all perfect* and *good*, are most likely to be the doctrines of *redemption*, where there are such depths of the riches both of his *wisdom* and *grace*.

1st. To suppose that nothing but the *refusal* of *offer'd help* can eventually destroy us, doth best illustrate the *holiness* of God. Great things are said of this attribute in scripture, ^a *holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts*. ^b *He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. ^c *He is glorious in holiness*. Now, what is his holiness? Why, it is the absolute *rectitude* and *perfection* of the divine nature, according to which all the operations of his infinite mind and will, together with his word and

^a Isai. vi. 3. ^b Hab. i. 13. ^c Ex. xv. 11.

worship, are exactly ordered; and which disposes God to take the highest delight in all the appearances of holiness in his creatures, and eternally to abhor every thing that is contrary thereto.

Now, if God has so far consulted our fallen state in the remedy he has provided, that it is left to our fair choice, whether we will be holy or unholy; and if God, to shew his delight in the former, has (as an holy and wise governour) given us a perfect rule of holiness, enforced by infinite and eternal rewards and punishments: He must appear to every impartial beholder to be an holy being; in that all the advantages of his government lie on the side of holiness. But if he only presents us with an impossible rule, sets before us impossible blessings; and threatens us with unavoidable vengeance; this may excite an enmity against God, but will never dispose us to give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness, or to endeavour to be holy as God is holy.

2dly. It best vindicates the justice and the righteousness of God. We are told, ^d that *the Lord is righteous in all his ways.* ^e That *there is no unrighteousness in him.* ^f That *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.* But what is the justice and righteousness of God? It is that perfect knowledge and love of equity, by which he neither is, nor can be guilty of any thing the least injurious unto himself, or to his creature; but is exact and equal in the highest degree, both in the distribution of rewards and punishments.

Now, if the soul that sins doth die; and this, because he will not accept of life; if

^d Pf. cxlv. 17.

^e Pf. xcii. 15.

^f Pf. xi. 7.

our destruction is of *our selves*, and if we *our selves* had help *offered us* to have prevented this destruction, how unspotted and how clear doth the equity of the divine proceedings shew? How safely may the great God appeal unto every man's own conscience, whether he has any pleasure *at all* in the death of the wicked? And say, are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal? As he said to rebellious *Israel*, and now, ⁸ O inhabitants of *Jerusalem* and men of *Judah*, judge I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What room to clamour against God, since where there is a willing mind, it is accepted (as the apostle observes of their charity) according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

But if God requires of him to whom he gave but one talent, the same encrease, as he requires of them to whom he gave two or five talents; and for want of such encrease doth cast him as a wicked and slothful servant into outward darkness; the servant of this Lord wou'd have some colour to say, thou art an hard master, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strew'd. And yet wou'd not some persuade us, that tho' we have not one talent, but what we lost in *Adam*, and therefore what we never had; yet God requires the same encrease of us, and upon the same penalty, as he expected it from *Adam*, to whom he gave all talents? Nay; that a much sorer punishment shall fall upon his posterity for coming into the world without his talents, then for the abuse of any other lower gifts and powers that were committed to their own keeping and improvement.

⁸ Isa. v. 3.

Oh! how difficult must it be to prove God's ways equal, upon such a dispensation of things? and indeed they seem conscious of it, in that they don't pretend to clear up the divine justice, but by betaking themselves to the divine sovereignty, and affirming that he is above justice. Or, by asserting that injustice in man, may be justice in God; as if God was less just than his creature. Upon the same foot of arguing another might say, the divine being might be what we call unholy, false, and cruel; and plead that all these (when weigh'd in the scale of the divine sovereignty) may be holiness, truth and mercy. But we shou'd have a care of calling light darkness, and darkness light, sweet bitter and bitter sweet, ^s good evil and evil good: Lest it expose us to the woe of such as are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. ^h

3dly, It best vindicates the mercy and goodness of God. One of the prime characters of the divine being is this, ⁱ *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious.* ^k *Thou art Good, and dost good.* ^l *He is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.* When God proceeds to works of severity, He is said ^m *to do his work, his strange work; to bring to pass his act, his strange act.*

Now this account of the divine mercy must appear to the most captious caviller to be fair and right, on supposition, that even tho' we were *our own* destroyers, yet God has *provided* help, an help that is suited to our fallen state and necessities: Nay, hath given unto standing

^s Isai. v. 20. ^h ver. 21. ⁱ Ex. xxxiv. 7. ^k Ps. cxix. 68. ^l Ps. cxlv. 9. ^m Isai. xxviii. 21.

officers in his church the ministry of reconciliation, viz. That God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their iniquities: And hath made it their business, as ambassadors of Christ, as tho' God did beseech you by them, to pray you in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God; who hath made *him* to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.ⁿ

How pathetic is the language of mercy in the expostulations of our blessed saviour! ° O *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often wou'd I have gathered thy children together, even as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye *would not*? Behold, *your house is left unto you desolate*. Lay but their ruin upon their *wou'd not*, after such condescensions of love, and the divine compassions appear in all their bowels, and are worthy of himself. But, do but change the phrase into [and ye *cou'd not*] the real cause was not in your selves, but in your first parents, or in my heavenly Father, who deny'd needful help; and then all this pity is but as a *sounding brass*, and a *tinkling cymbal*, is really nothing; a solemn amusement to gloss over the implacableness of the Divine Being, who is bent upon their destruction, is of one mind, and who can turn him.

4thly, It best vindicates the truth and sincerity of God. What great things are said of this attribute? ° *The truth of the Lord endures for ever*. ° *He is faithful that hath promised*: It is impossible for God to lie^r. And it is well for us, that it

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 18, to 21. ° Mat. xxiii. 37, 38. ° Psal. cxvii. 2.
^r Heb. x. 23. ° Heb. vi. 18.

is so; for otherwise the life and immortality the Gospel brings to light, might be a meer phantom, a shadow, a chimæra; and, perhaps, the perdition of ungodly men, the vengeance of eternal fire, might be a bug-bear to fright the world into awe and obedience, without any reality and suitable terrors accompanying them. But what is implied in this attribute of truth? Why,

It is that perfect knowledge and unspotted integrity, as infallibly secures God against all kinds and degrees of mistake and error, and also against all manner of deceit and falshood; so that we may safely conclude, he is the same in his *Being*, in his *Word* and *Works*, as he declares himself to be.

Now upon the supposition, that we who have destroy'd ourselves, have offered help; that God has done all that becomes a governour of *rational* and *free* agents (for *all* freedom is not lost by the fall) to save them from impending wrath, and to make them holy: On this Supposition, it is no stain to the divine sincerity and truth, to say, *Why will ye die, O house of Israel? Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord? And not that he should return from his ways, and live? What could have been done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? I looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.* But if God had not one single thought of pity towards sinners; if he never intended so much as the *possibility* of their recovery; never design'd that the guilt of their destruction should be left upon their own

^f Ezek. xxxiii. 11. ^t ——— xviii. 23. ^u Isai. v. 4. 7.

neglect, willful neglect of the great salvation; upon their love of darkness rather than light: If escape from the wrath to come be impossible, either by the sinner's own strength, or by any help he can reach; how disagreeable to the veracity and undisguised simplicity of God is such language, particularly the language of our blessed Saviour? *When Christ was near Jerusalem, he beheld the City and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side; and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee: And they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another. Why so? Because they could not drink up the sea, swallow down the earth, or pluck down the stars; do impossibilities? No, no; but because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation: Mightest, and yet didst not know, consider the time of thy Visitation.*

Secondly, It is a friend to the Rule of Worship.

This account of our present state, *That as we want help, so help may be had by us,* serves best to reconcile the language of the holy Scriptures, and gives a greater reputation and force unto the promises and threatenings recorded there.

1st, It best reconciles the language of the holy Scriptures. * *If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if an house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand, says our Saviour.* So here, if the scripture be divided

* Mat. iii. 24, 25.

against itself, the scripture cannot stand. It is therefore a special piece of wisdom so to compare spiritual things with spiritual, that the whole may appear harmonious. It has been the great artifice of the adversaries of Revelation, to set it at variance with itself; thereby to bring the *whole* into disreputation, to lessen its authority and truth. Most errors have arose either from a *contempt* of *Revelation*, or from an *adherence* unto *one part* in opposition to *another*. It is easy to trace the prevailing errors of this day, whether of greater or lesser size, unto one of these two sources. Either the *whole* of divine prophecy is *despised*, or some *one part* is *superstitiously exalted* above the rest. But that *scheme* of doctrines which gives unto every portion its due, that treats all scripture as true, that keeps up a reverence and respect unto the *whole*, by reconciling, upon a fair and natural interpretation the several parts together, bids fairest to be right, and is certainly to be preferred.

Now the point I am contending for, does (as I conceive) reconcile best the language of scripture, and that in its obvious and plain sense. Suppose but that man is destroy'd, has destroy'd *himself*; and yet that God is *able* and *willing* to help him; and the oracles of God shew themselves to be full of concord and agreement; of the same mind, and speaking one and the same thing. For,

Then *we* are to *act still*, but only to act in *dependance* upon the *divine aid*; and the various duties of Christianity, they are both our *own work*, and the work of God too, tho' in different respects.

Then *we* may be commanded to *repent*; tho' Christ be exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour
to

to give repentance ^r. It may be said to be ^r *our* own act, and yet our Saviour's gift : Then, we may be said to turn *our selves* from all our transgressions ^a; and yet pray with *Ephraim*, *turn thou me, and I shall be turned.* ^b

Then, we may be commanded *to make ourselves a new heart and a new spirit* ^c; and yet own, with *David*, that *God* must create in us a clean heart ^d, and renew a right spirit within us; we being co-workers, tho' in an inferior manner, with *God* himself.

Then, it may be said, we are *weak*, and yet are we *strong* ^e; weak in ourselves, but strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Then, it may be said, to them that are dead in trespasses and sins ^f, *Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light* ^g. Because we are not *so dead*, but that we may come for life; even unto him who is the resurrection and the life. As the believer, tho' he be dead *to sin*, *Rom*, vi. 2. is not *so dead to sin*, but that he yet *can sin*.

Then, it may be *our duty* to *work out* our own salvation, ; tho' it must be *God* that worketh in us to *will* and to *do* ^h; for what we *do*, or *may do* by the offered help of another; we as really *do*, or *may do*, as if it was to be done by our native strength; and the work may be ascribed either unto *God* or unto *us*, in different respects. And what we may have divine aid to *perform*, is as much our sin to *neglect*, as if it could be perform'd *without* that aid; *I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the*

^r Ezek. xviii. 30. ^a Acts v. 31. ^c Ezek. xviii. 30, 32.
^b Jer. xxxi. 18. ^e Ezek. xviii. 31. ^d Ps. li. 10. ^f 2 Cor. xii. 10.
^g Eph. ii. 1. ^h v. 14. ^h Phil. ii. 12, 13.

*Lord God: Wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.*¹

Then, tho' *Paul* and *Apollos* are nothing, but ministers by whom ye believe; and tho' it be God that giveth the encrease; yet, not to put sinners in mind of their danger, is for ministers to be guilty of their blood: and for sinners not to fly, upon this warning, from the wrath to come, is to destroy *themselves*^k. All these and many more of the like nature, are very intelligible and reconcileable truths upon this supposition, that sinners both want help and may have it: but are perfect paradoxes without it. Would we not be wiser than God, our business is first to shew sinners their malady and their remedy; what they need, and that God's grace is sufficient for them, his strength is ready to be made perfect in their weakness: and then, to call upon them and exhort them to *action*, as if this help was their own.¹ *Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?*

Secondly, It gives a reputation and force unto divine promises and threatnings. To one that believes, he both *wants* help, and *may have* it, the promises will appear not only exceeding great, but *precious*; and the threatnings not only terrible, but *just* and *righteous*.

In the scriptures are given unto sinners exceeding great and precious promises, that by these they might be partakers of the divine nature^m. They are design'd, you see, for a *noble* end; and upon supposition that the blessings they tender, are not put beyond the *possible reach* of the creature, they are wonderfully adapted to that end.

¹ Ezek. xviii. 32. ^k Ezek. iii. 18, 19. ¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 11. ^m 2 Pet. i. 4.

What

What glorious things are promised to reviving *Israel* in the latter days! *Ezek. xxxvi.* from *ver. 24.* to *38.* What endearing favours are they encouraged to expect from their God, when the year of recompences for the controversy of *Zion* shall come! only on this condition, that they humbly seek unto God for the performance of this covenant of their redemption, *ver. 37.* *Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.* To do what for them? why to make them an *holy, happy* people. Now, if an enquiry of the Lord to do it for them, be a duty of possible performance, with what a weight do these gracious promises sit upon the soul, calling with all the arguments of duty, ingenuity and interest, to ask and seek and knock; and not to lose such a treasure of blessings, even life from the dead, rather than not indulge their pride and sloth, rather than enquire humbly and fervently of the Lord to do it for them.

Whereas, if the *enquiry*, upon which the entire benefit of this great salvation is wholly suspended, was as much out of their reach and power, as the new heart and that new state that the promise tendered them: What an eclipse doth it bring upon all, and turn the brightest day of their deliverance from spiritual and temporal bondage, into a night of gloominess and thick darkness again? It all dwindles into shew and nothingness.

What a wonderful energy and force is there in that catalogue of divine blessings upon record, *Deuteronomy xxviii.* and promised unto the *Jews*, if they would hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God? supposing that to hearken unto his voice, was what they had offer'd *help* to perform.
Blessed

Blessed shalt thou be in the city, &c. 3, to 14. *ver.* But if they could neither hearken of themselves, nor obtain any assistance to enable them ; these promises vanish, are no more than a mighty cypher, and afford no more argument for obedience, or comfort in their endeavours after it, than if the divine promises had been *yea* and *nay*. Wast thou told that the sun is a sparkling diamond, of more value than the whole world, and should be thine, wouldst thou but touch it with thy finger ; such a promise would be esteemed as nothing, and be of no avail with thee. Promises upon impossible conditions are no promises, are ridicule and mockery ; they lose their grandeur and their value, and are all one as if he that sitteth in the heavens should laugh at us, and have us in derision. But it is vastly otherwise, if God, in the terms of his offer'd blessings, either comes down to the sinner's weakness, or tenders his almighty hand to raise us up unto the qualifications, to which he hath made his promises.

So as to the divine *threatnings* ; suppose but the disobedience against which they are denounced, not only wicked in itself, but what the sinner by his *own*, or *offer'd* strength, might avoid : and then they all appear terrible things in *righteousness* ; and the execution of them is not only a day of wrath, but the revelation of the *righteous* judgment of God. Then, if *Israel* will not hearken unto the voice of the Lord his God, he must thank himself, if he be cursed in the city, be cursed in the field ; if he be cursed in his basket and his store ; cursed in the fruit of his body, and in the fruit of his land, in the encrease of his kine, and in the flocks of his sheep ; cursed when he cometh in, and cur-

fed when he goeth out : If because he would not serve the Lord his God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things, he be made to serve his enemies, which the Lord shall send against him, in hunger and in thirst, and in nakedness and in want of all things. Still *Israel* must say, I have destroy'd myself ; my iniquities have proved my overthrow. Thus does *David* despise the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight, and this not of necessity but choice ? Was he free and voluntary in his adultery and blood guiltiness, when he took the wife of *Uriah* to be his own, and kill'd her husband with the sword ? Then, how deserved, as well as dreadful, is the sentence against him ? Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou hast despised me. — I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them [or suffer them to be given] unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of the sun. "

Upon this supposition, I say, the sanctions of the divine law, God's promises and threatenings, become great and weighty ; God shews himself to be kind and faithful in the one ; without iniquity, just and right in the other. The reputation and authority of his government are maintain'd, whilst we suppose the blessings to be offer'd upon possible terms ; and that not the invincible, but voluntary transgressions of the creature, exposes it to his vengeance.

Thirdly, It is a friend unto the ordinances of worship.

" 2 Sam. xii. 9, to ver. 12.

This account of our state makes it not only a great *duty* to attend upon, but a great *privilege* to enjoy gospel ordinances.

None, I think, will deny the *duty* of attending; none that bear and deserve the name of Christians, will say, it is a matter of a meer indifferency, whether the acts of divine worship be perform'd or no. For, is there a woe to him that preaches not the gospel, and none to those that refuse to hear it? Do they that offer praise glorify God? and yet is it at every man's pleasure, whether he will praise him or not? whether he will glorify God or no? Can a man restrain prayer and be innocent? And yet God threaten to pour out his wrath upon them that call not upon his name? Or, shall God write unto us the great things of his law, and can we be faultless to account them a strange thing, to turn away our eyes from them? So as to the sacraments of the new-testament, baptism and the lord's supper, did our lord condescend to leave us such memorials or pledges of his love, and is there no obligation upon us to celebrate his love in them? The *duty* of attending upon gospel ordinances, is what all, in a manner, will allow. Tho' how to *prove* it a duty is more difficult, if all sin be *necessary*, and so those that neglect divine worship, neither *will nor can* attend upon it. A strange duty, to be obliged to do something with nothing! A duty to *be* what I cannot but *not be*! Why mayn't it be a duty too for the blind to see, for the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak!

But grant it to be a *duty* to attend upon, where is the *privilege* to enjoy gospel ordinances? If there be no *Gospel* to be had in them;

if they are such *means* as have *no connection* with the *end*; if the *ordinances* of grace by our best attendance upon them, *will* never, *can* never help us to the *grace* of ordinances. What encouragement to come for something, if nothing is to be had? To come for salvation in an ordinance, if there be no salvation tendered by that ordinance, or tendered to none but to those that come with what they *have not*, what they *cannot have*? Who, tho' thirsty, would *endeavour* to come to the waters for wine and milk, that believes he *cannot come*, or that no wine or milk is to be had, tho' he come? Would *Peter* have toil'd all night, if he knew there had been no fish, or that his net could have held none? How heartless must it be, to draw at the wells of salvation, if the salvation be not there; or beyond the reach of our chain and bucket? Is not this all one, as to spend our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not?

But if *faith* comes by *hearing*, then there is encouragement to hear; to be swift to hear, to take heed how I hear: And if the holy Spirit may be had by those that ask and seek, then it is worth the while to ask and seek; to be fervent in prayer, and diligent in seeking. ° When God commanded *Moses* to take a serpent of brass, and to put it upon a pole; and promised, that every one who was bitten, when he looked upon it, should live: It was not a promise to those that were blind; but to those that had eyes to see this serpent. They had a power to observe this ordinance, and in keeping this commandment they had a reward; they

° Numb. xxi. 8.

were healed. *Bethesda's* pool had been but of little fame, notwithstanding the troubling of the water by an *angel*, if none could have stepped in: But since they could not come up to the angel, the angel comes down to them; and the healing virtue is brought to a pool, whither the blind, and the halt, and the withered might come. Now is there a greater privilege and prospect in attending upon a *typical* ordinance than on one that is *spiritual*? Is the shadow more adapted for our relief than the substance? Have the appointments of the better covenant less encouragement than a carnal ordinance, than beggerly elements? Hath the law and the commandments given by *Moses* more grace and truth, than that which came by *Jesus Christ*? No wonder if the Gospel-worship be so despised, should its institutions, like *Pharaoh's* lean kine, be of no avail, but to eat up our time and strength. What a meagre and pithless thing does a gospel-ordinance appear, when all the blessings of the ordinance are set beyond the comers *sight* or *reach*?

But now, if the *Benefit* of the ordinance be annexed to any *possible* act of our own, the ordinance itself is a *privilege*, a great privilege. To be bid, with *Naaman*, to go and to wash in *Jordan* seven times; and to be assured that our leprosy shall be cleansed, is a favour indeed! Our proud hearts, it is true, may dictate another method; may whisper that *Abana* and *Pharpar* are better than all the waters of *Israel*: And say, with that haughty leper, Behold, I thought, he will surely come to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. What then? Our cooler
thoughts

thoughts must approve of divine institutions, as not only of a possible attendance, but as *reasonable* and encouraging; and say, with *Naaman's* servants, my father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, woud'st thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith unto thee, *Wash and be clean*?. *Joshua* is commanded, with all his men of war, to compass *Jericho*; and to go round about it once for six days successively; seven priests are bid to bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams horns; on the seventh day they are required to compass the city seven times, and the priests to blow with the trumpets; and all the people, when they hear the sound of the trumpet, are charg'd to shout with a great shout: This is the ordinance, and it is of possible performance: and it is to *their part*, the part they *could do*, that God annexes the blessing, *The wall of the city shall fall down flat*. The help being offer'd in a way they *might* obtain it, was the thing that animated their obedience, and made their duty not only a reasonable, but an encouraging service.

Fourthly, It is a friend to the gospel in general.

To suppose, *That tho' we have destroy'd ourselves, yet in God is offer'd help*, is a friend to the spread, to the study, and success of the gospel.

1st, To the spread of the gospel. How dismal is the state of those described to be, that are without the gospel? ^a Aliens from the common-wealth of *Israel*, strangers from the cove-

^p 2 Kings v. 10. ^a Ephes. ii. 12.

nants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world; ' a people that sit in darkness, that sit in the region and in the shadow of death; nay, says the apostle, ' if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, shou'd shine upon them. Intimating that all who are saved, are saved by the gospel, revealed *first or last, more or less*, in an *ordinary or extraordinary* way, unto their minds: there being no salvation in any other but Christ, and and none other name under heaven given amongst men, whereby we must be saved. Those that have not the *written* gospel, may without this gospel know that they are sinners, need to be reconciled to God, are ignorant of the way, *i. e.* that they *want* help, and *may* seek for help. And they that seek as *they may*, shall find help. So much of the Gospel shall be reveal'd to them, as is needful for their particular state and circumstances.

But now, if this gospel brings only a dead letter; a declaration that we are destroy'd, and that we have destroy'd ourselves; but whether there be help intended for any one, to whom it is preached, or any possibility of coming at it, remains as great a secret as if there had been no gospel sent unto them: Was it so, it wou'd be but small encouragement to *spread* it. It brings no olive branch in its mouth. They to whom we bring this gospel, may only have a *much sorer* punishment for refusing, what yet it was *in itself* most certain, was never in their

power to have chosen. Who wou'd sacrifice his ease, his honour, his interest, his life, to *spread* such a gospel? The spirit that (according to such) hath, after all, the *real* gospel in his *own* keeping, can preach it without our labour; and will do it, whether this outward call be heard or no.

Whereas, if this be the constitution of things, that *the gospel* [the gracious truths reveal'd *there*] is in the hand of the spirit the power of God unto salvation; that it sets life and death, blessing and cursing within the sinners view and reach; that it reaches forth a scepter that our feeble and guilty hand may take hold of; and opens a fountain that our filthy souls may wash in; that it presents poor sinners with a real and an only remedy: O, who would not be ambitious to have an hand in *spreading* this gospel! To see an expiring world dropping into everlasting flames, and to have the knowledge of that divine remedy, which only can relieve them: How void of generous pity and compassion must a person be, not to be at expence and pains to communicate this gracious secret in time unto them? Nowonder, if *Paul*, " under such a view of things, cries, what mean ye to weep, and to break my heart? I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at *Jerusalem* for the name of the Lord Jesus: And that in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings, " in all things he endeavoured to approve himself as the minister of God: And that he thought there was a woe due unto him, if he preach'd

" Acts xxi. 13. " 2 Cor. vi. 4, &c.

not the gospel. A record from heaven, so well attested by miracles, and the contents of which were so very important, that God had given unto sinners eternal life, and that this life was in his son; and that his son wou'd in no wise cast out those that come unto him; and that it must be owing not to their *weakness*, but to their *wickedness*, if they did not come unto him for this life: this is a gospel that humanity itself wou'd teach such as believe it to propagate. I say, it tends very much to encourage the spread of the gospel, when we consider the help it contains, so offered, as that nothing but the free and voluntary and wicked *act* or *refusal* of the creature can make it ineffectual.

2dly, It is a friend to the study of the gospel. How are the *Bereans* commended for this practice! These were more noble than those in *Thessalonica*, in that they receiv'd the word with all readiness of mind, and search'd the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed. You see how *profitable* as well as *laudable* this course was.

Now what can be a greater motive to search the scriptures, than to be told, that in them we have eternal life, the way to eternal life prescrib'd us? That they are able to make us wise unto salvation, thro' faith which is in Christ Jesus. This, *Paul* and *Barnabas* use as the great argument, why the *Gentiles* shou'd regard and attend to their ministry; Then *Paul* and *Barnabas* waxed bold, and said, it was necessary that the word of God shou'd first have been spoken unto you, [you Jews;] but seeing ye put it from you,

* Acts xvii. 11, 12. . 7 2 Tim. iii. 15,

and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn unto the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou should'st be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorify'd the word of the Lord. What word? That a salvation they cou'd not come at, was offer'd them? No, no; but, may these dry bones live? And is the way to life revealed? And are these oracles the book that contains this way? Does that faith without which it is impossible to please God, come by hearing, and hearing by the word of God? What a motive is this, to be swift to hear? To be instant in season and out of season? This sets an edge upon the appetite, and makes the word more to be desired than gold, than much fine gold; and gives a pleasure in the study, that is sweeter to the taste than honey, or the honey-comb.

3dly, It is a friend to the success of the gospel. Why does not the word preached, profit? The author to the *Hebrews* tells us; 'Tis not mixed with faith in them that hear it, Heb. iv. 2. Whatever therefore obstructs our believing the gospel, lessens the success of it.

What must we believe? Every one are agreed, it must be this, that the gospel is a manifestation of divine love to us; For we love HIM, because HE FIRST loved us; because we perceive that he first loved us. But is it reasonable to believe, God loves me, before it is revealed? This is to perceive it, before it is perceivable. So that, if this be the truth that must convert me, this truth is not yet revealed, if help be not offered to me. And if the spirit is to bring this truth from heaven, and to whisper it

it to my soul; then the gospel that must convert me, is not yet proposed to my faith: How then shou'd I believe it? Not to have faith before the evidence of faith is set before me, is no fault of mine! To let my faith out-run the evidence, or the grounds of faith, is a blind, a groundless faith, is mere enthusiasm.

Is this the way to dispose men to believe the gospel, to tell them they have as yet *no reason* to believe it? Is this the way to work that faith, without which the gospel preached cannot profit, to tell me, there is nothing offered to my faith that is saving? But if this light is come into the world, unto me; if it be set in a fair and discernable view; then I must love darkness rather than light, if I do not perceive it! And my unbelief must be my own fault, unreasonable, and the culpable cause of my receiving this grace in vain. And the reason, why you do not mix the word with faith at any time, is not because such a proposition, for instance, *The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin*, was not a truth before, was not revealed before; but because you did not attend so duly to the evidence that was there before, or to your great concern in and need of this truth. The spirit's work is not to teach us *new truths*, nor to help us to *new arguments* to believe them; but only to shew us the evidence that is there already: It is not his business to bring up another gospel, but to shew us the gospel that is already brought. To assert the contrary, is to enervate faith, and to hinder the success of the gospel, in that it tells us, there is yet no foundation in the present gospel for that faith, without which the gospel cannot profit me.

This

This account of our state, that as we want help, so we may have it, is,

Fifthly, A friend to the *two great doctrines* of the gospel in particular, viz. The Son's satisfaction, and the Spirit's operation.

1st, It gives the honour that is due to the *satisfaction* of the son. The atonement of his blood is never the *less*, but the *more* valuable, the more there are that are capable of receiving benefit by it. Neither is it the less available to the elect, because he is a propitiation not for their sins only, but for the sins of the whole world, 1 *Joh.* ii. 2. The greater the purchased blessings, the greater the price that purchased them: And the greater the price, the greater the person that paid it. This, methinks, shou'd be an endearing thought unto all such as tender the divinity of their saviour, especially at a day that the fulness of his godhead lies under such an eclipse.

It is not *possible*, says the apostle, ² that the blood of bulls and goats shou'd take away sin. But why not *possible*? If the satisfaction was an arbitrary thing; was any thing, *more* or *less*, that the divine being shou'd please to accept, without any regard unto the demerit of sin. But if the ransom must be equal unto the debt the sinner hath contracted; what but the blood of one, who was greater than either man, or angel, but the blood of him, in whom godhead dwelt, cou'd be a sufficient price for the souls of a world? Cou'd be a price sufficient to purchase a *possibility* of escape from the vengeance of eternal fire; and the *offer* of a blessed immor-

² Heb. x. 4.

talities in the presence of an injur'd but reconciled God? What but such a ransom as this, cou'd so declare God's righteousness, as to enable him to be just, ^a while he justified sinners that believed in Jesus?

2dly, It gives the honour that is due to the *sanctifying operations* of the *spirit*. Are his sanctifying influences the less to be valued, because they *may* be *had*? Or, because they may be had by *all*? Or, because they wou'd be effectual to sanctify *all* men, even in spirit, soul, and body, wou'd they be so just unto their own souls, and grateful to the holy spirit, as to yield to his operations? Or, are the spirit's influences the less efficacious on those that are chosen, because the fault is *others*, and not the *spirit's*, that they are not efficacious on them also? What if he dispenses his gracious assistances in a way, that makes our poor remaining activity useful, and needful in this work? Where's the reflection upon his wisdom, goodness, or power? What if the remedy be adapted to the present state, and surviving liberty of the sinner? Is his condescension and love contemptible, unless he work upon us as stones and statues? Is it not enough, that we *must* be all *taught of God*, unless it be impossible to desire his teachings too? That God is the help of *Israel*, unless *Israel* be incapable to seek his help? Or, is under a necessity to seek in vain? Is the spirit the less to be esteem'd, because he is a *free spirit*? and is ready to uphold the sinner, when he cries? *Pf. li. 12.*

^a Rom. iii. 26.

Sixthly,

Sixthly, It is a friend to the worshipper himself.

A deep conviction, that as we need the divine help, so we may have the help that we need, serves to rectify our judgments; to better our hearts; and to animate our endeavours.

1st, To rectify our judgments; particularly, as to the doctrines of *original sin*, of *perseverance*, and *assurance*.

1st, A firm belief that our present destruction is of our selves, will set our judgments right, or keep them so, in the doctrine of *original sin*. We shall neither believe, that *all sin* is *original*; nor that our *actual sins* are more *venial* and *harmless* than that which is *original*.

It will persuade us, that *all sin* is not *original*: That we are more than the mere pipes to convey the filthy streams from a poisonous fountain: that there is some bitterness in us, besides what we NECESSARILY derive from *Adam*, the root of the human race. It will persuade us, that our hearts are deceitful too, and desperately wicked: that we have errors, or faults that are our own *personal sins*; * *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.* We can then, with *David*, truly say, † *I acknowledge MY transgressions; and MY sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and DONE this evil in thy sight. That thou might'st be justified, when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

Whereas, if we were destroy'd by another only, then *all actual sin* wou'd be but *one*, and that not *our own*, viz. the eating the forbidden fruit: we shou'd be *passive* in every other offence; and shou'd have only *one sin* to lament; behold, I

* Ps. xix. 12. † Ps. li. 3, 4.

was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. There wou'd be no need for *David*, more than *others*, to pray, deliver me from *blood guiltiness*, O God, thou God of my salvation, And *spiritual* blindness wou'd be no more *our* fault, than *natural* blindness is in one that is *born* so: Not to *hear* God's word wou'd be no more *our* crime, than it is in one that is *deaf*: To be *silent* in God's *praises* wou'd be no more reproveable in *us*, than in one that is *dumb*: To reel and wander out of the way, thro' drunkenness, wou'd be no more *our* sin, than the tremblings and staggerings of a paralytick, of one seized with the palsie, is *his* sin. All offences wou'd become *necessary*, and *equally* heinous, or rather (comparatively speaking) *equally* harmless. And it wou'd be impertinent to pray with *David*, ^a keep back thy servant from *presumptuous* sins, let them not have dominion over me. In as much as *all* sins wou'd be *presumptuous* at this rate, or rather *none* so: And all transgressions wou'd be alike *great*, or *small*. And for one to be more wicked than another, wou'd be no more *his own* fault, than to be more deformed than another. And the reason why some did reject Christ in spite of all his *miracles*, must only prove, that *more* of *Adam's* corruption, *without their fault*, fell to their lot, and not that they *themselves* were *greater* offenders; contrary to our Saviour's reasoning, ^b *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen, and hated both me and my father,*

^a Pl. xix. 13.

^b John xv. 22, 23.

Again, this conviction, *That the sin which doth eventually destroy us, is our own, as it will constrain us to admit of actual sins; so it will not suffer us to conceive of them as more venial and harmless, than that which is original.* Some may imagine, that God will be *more severe* in punishing us for that which is the fruit of *necessity*, and is committed without the *proper consent* of our Wills, than in punishing our most spontaneous, voluntary and *free* transgressions: Forgetting that to connect destruction with the offence of our grand parent only, is to make it to be a *greater crime* (if we may judge of crimes by their punishments) to be his *child*; than to be his *rebellious child*; or, a greater crime to be a rebel *against*, or *without* our wills, than *with* our wills; and that more stripes are reserved for those that *could not*, than for those that *would not* do their Master's will: and that it is no longer *the condemnation*, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light; in that it will be *eventually* a *greater condemnation*, that we were *first* born in darkness.

But God puts the trial of the equity of his proceedings upon another foot. * *Ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel, is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done, shall he die. Again, when a wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath*

* Ezek. xviii. 25--29.

committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, the way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? God seems to allow the charge, that if they were destroy'd for others crimes, his equity would have been stain'd. Therefore to evince that his ways are equal, he assures them, they are their own destroyers: The soul that sins doth die. He does not fly to the poor refuge of his sovereignty, that as he is above the reach of their resentments, so he is above the rules of justice. No, God enters into a fair debate; tries the cause by an equitable rule, such as their own conscience must approve of; and vindicates his justice by a conformity to it. So the process at the great day is put upon the same foot; the sentence of death is grounded, not upon the neglect of what was of impossible performance, but of what they might have done, but did not. *I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye cloathed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.* Now had not these things been possible for them to have done, our Lord, by his reply to their answer, allows, that the neglect had not been criminal, much less damning. *When saw we thee an hungred, or a-thirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?* They plead the want of an opportunity as an excuse; they were under an incapacity of shewing these offices of kindness. But observe our Lord's answer, *Verily I say unto you, in as much as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye*

did it not to me. And then, having cleared up the possibility of the duty, and by consequence, the equity of the charge, he proceeds to sentence ; *These shall go away into everlasting punishment.*

And indeed, if our destruction is *more* from another than from *ourselves*, this would be so far from *not slaying* the righteous with the wicked, that the *sin* of which we are *comparatively innocent*, wou'd bring *heavier* wrath upon us, than *that* of which we are *most guilty*. So that *Abraham's* expostulation with God about the destruction of the righteous, must be very weak and insignificant, *That be far from thee, to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee ; shall not the judge of all the earth do right ?*

'Tis wrong for us to treat innocency as guilt ; or, to confound in punishment less offences with those that are greater. Let none speak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for him. He needs it not ; he approves it not. He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination unto the Lord. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son ; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

2dly, This supposition, that we have destroy'd ourselves ; and yet that in God there is offer'd help, tends to rectify our judgments about the doctrine of perseverance.

That there is a state of grace, which those

^r Mat. xxv. 46
^s Prov. xvii. 15.

^s Gen. xviii. 25.
^s Ezek. xviii. 20.

^s Job xiii. 7.

that attain to it, shall never lose, is, I think, very plainly reveal'd. ¹ *Whom he call'd, them he also justify'd: and whom he justify'd, them he also glorify'd.* ^m *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they wou'd no doubt have continued with us: But they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us.* ⁿ *Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, [viz. as once he did] because he is born of God.* You see the perseverance of the saints has a solid foundation in scripture: And yet this doctrine has been flatly deny'd by some, and been indeed as oddly perverted by others.

The ground of these mistakes I take to be this, they have not sufficiently distinguish'd between the *help* that is offer'd, and the *coming* for this help; between *consenting* to be taught Christianity, and *consenting* to the Christianity that is taught: Or, between *coming to Christ* as a teacher sent of God, and *coming over* to the truths that he teaches. These two, that are so widely different, are taken for one and the same thing. Hence every one that enters himself into Christ's school, that is willing to be Christ's disciple, to learn *for a time* what his heavenly doctrines are, is presently concluded to be one that is truly *come over* to his interest and kingdom; to be born again, and a child of God. Now observing that many such who enter themselves scholars, and wait with some degree of sincerity upon their great Master in his ordinances *one day*, turn themselves out again, and turn their backs upon his holy institutions, *another day*: See,

¹ Rom. viii. 30.

^m 1 John ii. 19.

ⁿ — iii. 9.

says *one side*, a child of God to day, a child of the devil to morrow! What's become of your *perseverance* now! And so they give in unto the error of a *total* and *final* falling away from *real holiness* or grace; as if Christ had never interceded, that the faith of his people should not utterly fail them; nor had promised that he would give them eternal life, and they should not perish, and that none should pluck them out of his hand°. Or, that the doctrine of *perseverance* might stand, notwithstanding such apostacies, they on the *other side* contend, that all this visible and obstinate wickedness is nothing, but grace under an eclipse; and therefore write them the saints and the faithful in Christ Jesus, nevertheless: The *one* asserting that *true grace* may be *intirely* lost; and the *other* placing the true grace of such in a *nonentity*, in a state of visible enmity against God, and nonsubjection to his laws.

Whereas many that consented for a while to learn of Christ, never once heartily consented to the great things they learnt of him. This was the case of the young man in the gospel. *There came one running, and kneeled to Jesus, and asked him, good master, what shall I do, that I might inherit eternal life?* He enters himself, you see, into Christ's school; and Christ is willing to teach him. *And Jesus said unto him, thou knowest the Commandments, Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, defraud not, honour thy father and thy mother.* And when the young man answered and said unto him, *Master, all these have I observed from my youth up.* Then Jesus beholding him, loved him;

° John x. 28.

[encouraged him by his smiles to learn on ;] and said unto him, *One thing thou lackest, go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven ; and come, take up the cross and follow me.* But now, when he understands what *real christianity* is, *the loving of God and heaven above all, and the bearing the cross* ; he refuses to consent to this, and turns himself out of Christ's school again. ^p *He was sad at the saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions* ; like many a patient, who applies to the physician for help, but when he understands the cost and the trouble of a cure, refuses after all to submit to the operation, and dies of his disease.

This *first* conversion may be lost ; this consenting to be taught christianity is our *own act*, within the sphere of our own powers, what we may take up and lay down again at pleasure. There is no need of a new heart and a right spirit, of being created in Christ Jesus, to do works of this nature.

But that *second* conversion, which is conversion properly and truly so called, *cannot be lost.* *i. e.* If we stay in Christ's school, till we have practically learnt christianity ; if we search and dig, till we have found this wisdom, this pearl of price, we shall see that it is more precious than rubies, and that all that can be desired, is not to be compared with it : we shall buy the truth and sell it not. Christ will, if we follow on to know christianity, set the great duties of it, *a love to God and man*, in such a convincing, persuasive light, will give us such a spiritual and powerful demonstration of these graces ; shew us so much of the excellency, beauty, and

advantage of them ; will set before us such a glorious and superlative reward ; that we shall find it *morally* impossible to return to our old state of *inveteracy* and *malice* again, to hate God and love death.

Besides, for their further consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before them : the angels are all ministering spirits, ^a sent forth to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation ; nay, they have a promise, that the spirit it self shall abide with them always, to counterwork all the methods and devices of the evil one to seduce them. God has entred (if I may so express it) into an offensive and defensive league with them ; and engages, that his grace shall be sufficient for them, that his strength shall be made perfect in their weakness. And he is faithful who hath promised, that he will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able^r, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it.

3dly, It sets the doctrine of *assurance* upon a more *rational* foundation.

There are two things that the gospel seems principally concern'd to assure us of, 1st, That help may be had to sanctify us ; and 2dly, That those who are sanctify'd, shall be saved.

1st, One great design of the gospel is to assure us, that help may be had to sanctify us. Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets, she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates^r : in the city she uttereth her words, saying, how long ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity ? and the scorers delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge ?

^a Heb. i. 14. ^r 1 Cor. x. 13. ^r Prov. i. 20, &c.

Turn ye at my reproof. As if he had said, no longer bate, but cry after knowledge, lift up your voice for understanding. What then? *behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.* So, if thou seekest her as silver; and searchest for her as for hid treasure; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. So again, *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For EVERY ONE that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.* Or, what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him? Luke reads it thus, *"How much more shall your heavenly Father give his holy spirit to them that ASK him?* None that ask are excluded.

Now that this promise unto them that ask, &c. is not made to them that *have* what they ask for, but to those that have it *not*, have not the spirit, have it not in the *sense* they are called to ask for it, have not these good things, is not only plain from the nature of the thing; *A promise to give what we bring with us, is no promise:* And also from the comparison, *The Father gives bread and fish not to the son that hath them, but to the son that WANTS them:* But it is further evident from the conclusion of our Saviour's sermon, where we are told, these things were preach'd unto the *multitude*, as well as to his special disciples: *And it came to pass, when Jesus*

* Prov. ii. 4, 5. " Mat. vii. 7, to ver. 11. " Luke

had ended these sayings, the PEOPLE were astonish'd at his doctrine; for he taught them, i. e. the PEOPLE, as one having authority, and not as the Scribes. Thus, you see, how ready the gospel is to assure us, that help is to be had by poor sinners to sanctify them.

Now, their part is to ask, to seek and knock; and to assure themselves, that if they continue to do so, they shall not seek in vain. Depending upon the divine faithfulness, they should ask in faith, nothing wavering. And here is a reasonable ground for our assurance of success, if we can know what these duties are, and how to come at power to perform them: There is real encouragement, as we are taught by the parable of the unjust judge, always to pray, and not to faint. But if this asking, seeking and knocking is what we can form no notion of; or, could we conceive the meaning, if they be impossible for us to do; or, could they be possibly performed, if they did yet entitle us to nothing, unless we were, what it is as yet, [i. e. during our seeking] impossible for us to know we are, viz. the subjects of electing love: If the case was thus, then to assure ourselves of success in such a course, would be only confidence and presumption, and not assurance; it would be all imagination and enthusiasm, and could afford no reasonable consolation to us.

2dly, Another great design of the gospel is to assure us, That those who are sanctified, shall be saved. * Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. † Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. Paul a servant of God, and an A-

* Mat. v. 8. † 1 Cor. ii. 9.

posse of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and acknowledging of the truth, which is after godliness, *in hope of eternal life*, which God that cannot lie, hath promised². These great and precious promises are given, not only that we might be partakers of the divine nature, (excited by such a glorious recompence of reward to seek after it) but that being partakers of the divine nature [of holiness] we might have peace with God, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

And it is every christian's part to shew the same diligence with them, that are gone before to the *full assurance* of hope unto the end^a. To give diligence to make their calling *sure*: For if they do these things, they shall never fall; ^b for so an entrance shall be ministred unto them abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And there is a reasonable ground for such an assurance, if this sanctifying help, to which the promise of eternal life is annex'd, be really offered in the gospel. For then it is supposed, that we may know *what* the help is that we want, and know *when* we have obtained this help; and so whether we do indeed stand related to the *reward* or no.

But if the divine nature be something the gospel speaks nothing of, or speaks of in an unknown tongue; then we shall be eternally at a loss, whether we be holy, or not; and so, whether heaven will be our portion, or no; without a voice from heaven, which yet will want as great a miracle, as those that were wrought in the apostles days, to demonstrate it to be the voice of God, to be such a record as

^a Tit. i. 2. ^b Heb. vi. 11. ^c 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

our souls may safely rest their eternal all upon. Hence it is, that many weak Christians, for want of this divine impulse, reject the cup of consolation; shut themselves up in darkness, and will see no light; tho' a love to God and the love of the brethren be shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost that is given unto them. Whereas all the evidence we can now expect, in an *ordinary way*, is, that the spirit itself in his written word shou'd bear witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God, have the disposition and spirit of children. And without any farther revelation from heaven, our part is with the apostle, to infer, • *If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*; we perceive by a consciousness of our own acts and by their genuine fruits, that we have the real reverence, affiance and love of children; and the spirit in his word witnesses with our spirits, that this is filial confidence, and reverence and love; and that the kingdom of heaven is promised to such a temper: And from the sure word of prophecy, and from the convictions of our own spirits, we arrive at a *reasonable* assurance of that blessed hope which is set before us. This is calm and sedate, clear and solid: but what is more than this, is not only groundlessly expected, but confus'd and doubtful, and too often nothing but the spurious offspring of a warm and heated imagination.

Thus you see, what a friend the doctrine of our *need and help* is to a *rational* assurance, such as the prophane, perhaps, may sneer at, but what none (perhaps) but a *Deist* or an *Atheist*, will deny to be well grounded.

2dly, It serves not only to *rectify* our judgments, but to *better* our hearts. It is an encouragement to *faith* and *repentance*, to *hope* and *love*, to *humility* and *patience*. A deep conviction, that the sin which doth *eventually* destroy us is our own, is,

1st, An argument for faith. It is a strong inducement to believe the *word* of God, and to believe in Christ.

1st, We shall be the better disposed to give credit to the *word* of God. Of what importance an hearty assent unto divine truths is, may be learnt from what the apostle says of those that want it. *He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar.* Now there are two great points of special necessity to be believed; the *existence* of an infinitely *perfect* being, and his *kindness* towards sinners. *He that comes unto God must believe that he is, * and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* Without this faith it is impossible to please God.

But now if things are in such a state, that we are destroy'd, whether *we will* or *no*; that there is no *possible* help within *our* reach; we shall find it a real discouragement to the belief of these two great articles.

Is God an *infinitely perfect* being? And yet shall men be punish'd with an everlasting destruction *from* or *by* the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power; tho' it was an utter *impossibility* for them, with all the help that the gospel brought them, to *know* or *obey*? Will Christ Jesus, with his mighty angels, be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them for no greater crime, than for *not doing* an *impossibility*? Shall any, for *not acting*, tho' *without power*, have

d 1 John v. 10.

* Heb. xi. 6.

an hotter hell than that denounced against *Adam*, who sinned *against all power*! This is *the* condemnation, &c. wou'd not this give too great a countenance to the exploded heresy of the *Manichees*? And tempt some to hold two Gods, two independent and original causes of things? The *one*, the cause of all that's *good*; the *other*, of all that's *evil*? And to believe, that it is their unhappy lot to be under the government of the *evil one*?

Besides, what an odd idea must it exhibit of the divine *kindness* towards *sinners*, to represent God as giving them the *offer* of eternal life upon *impossible* terms? Or, that he is a rewarder of them that seek him, in a way they *cannot* seek him, either by any *power* of their *own*, or by any power of *his*, that they *can* come at? Whereas, if we do indeed destroy *ourselves*, then the *cause* of our destruction is what *we ourselves* might have prevented: Which gives us a notion of the divine *perfection* and *benignity* every way worthy of himself: It leaves us speechless and dumb: ^f God is no longer unrighteous that taketh vengeance, but may judge the world.

2dly, It will the better dispose us to a *believing recumbency* on Christ.

What moving invitations are there to come unto Christ? Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Encline your ear, and come unto me ^g. So, he that cometh unto me, shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me, shall never thirst ^h. He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. Ye will not come unto me, ⁱ that ye might have

^f Rom. iii. 4, 6. ^g Isa. v. 5, 1, 3. v. ^h Joh. vi. 35, 37. ⁱ Joh. v. 40.

life. Let him that is a thirst, come. And who-
soever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

Now, what an encouragement is this to *come*? and when we are come, to *hope*, and quietly to wait for his salvation; if there be any *power* in the sinner to *come*, and salvation may be *had* by him that comes? But if he must believe, he *knows not*, he *cannot know*, what it is to *come*; or, *how* to come; or, that nothing is to be had, tho' he come; or, that he must have the salvation, before he come: What a darkness and perplexity doth this draw upon the soul of the sinner, leaving him either in despair, or careless; to conclude either that the blessed hope is a blessed nothing, or that this blessing is to be obtained by doing nothing? What a *Babel* and confusion into divine language, do we introduce? When we tell sinners, that coming *for* grace and glory is coming *with* them; that if they will come *with* grace, they shall *have* grace; if they will come *with* glory, they shall *have* glory: Let them but bring the thing they come for, and they are sure not to go away without it: As if to come for an alms, was to bring it in our hands with us. What a *Babel* and confusion, I say, do we introduce into divine language, to tell sinners, that none can come *for* faith, *for* virtue, *for* knowledge, *for* patience, *for* godliness, *for* brotherly kindness, or charity or *for* any other grace of the spirit, *without* the very faith and virtue, knowledge and patience, godliness, and brotherly kindness, *without* the charity or particular grace that he comes for? But as *Paul* observes of hope, *hope that is seen is not hope: For what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?* But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

1 Rev. xxii. 17. 2 Rom. viii. 24, 25.

So here, to come for that which we *have*, is not in a scripture sense to come: For what a man *hath*, why doth he yet come for? But if we come for what we have not, then do we with patience wait for it, *i. e.* if it be promised to those that come.

But still, says the sinner, I am taught to believe, *I cannot come*, ¹ *None CAN come unto Christ, except the father draw him*. Say, that none *can* come unto Christ, except the father draw him. What then? This does not imply, that to come unto Christ, is to bring *with you* the Christ you come for: Or, that none can come unto the father *to draw* them, without the very *drawing* of the father they come for. Remember therefore, that there is, as has been observed already, a twofold coming to Christ; a coming to be taught, and a coming over to the truths that are taught: Or, there is a coming to Christ's school, and a coming over to the christianity taught in his school. It is one thing to consent to be Christ's disciple and scholar; and another thing to consent heartily to the doctrines of our great master and teacher. When our Saviour tells them, no man *can* come to me, except the father draw him: his meaning is, no man can come *over* to his interest and kingdom without his drawings. Cou'd we teach ourselves, we need not come to God to teach us. We must be all taught of God, before we shall come out of ourselves, and rely upon Christ for righteousness and strength. ^m *Every man that hath heard and learnt of the father, cometh unto me*, says our Saviour. We must first receive the spirit which is of God, ⁿ before we can know [*practically know*] the things that are freely given to us of God. It is of this *latter* coming our Lord speaks, when he says, they *cannot* come.

¹ Joh. vi. 44. ^m Joh. vi. 45. ⁿ 1 Cor. ii. 12.

What then? To enter ourselves into Christ's school, (as has been shewn above) and to attend upon the lectures he reads there, this is in our power, and what belongs unto us. We may know with *Nicodemus*, that Jesus is a teacher come from God, for that no man could do the miracles that he did, except God was with him; and we may be induced hereby, to come (as he did) to Jesus, and to call him *Rabbi*, or Master. Tho' with respect to the doctrines taught, we may say at first, *How can those things be?* *John* iii. 2, 9. It is (I humbly conceive) to this coming the promises of help are made, *we shall know God*, (savingly know him) *if we follow on to know him*, *Hosea* vi. 3. *i. e.* if we continue to sit at Jesus his feet, wait upon him in his various schools, or ordinances, desirous to see divine objects set in a convincing persuasive light. Such meek ones he will guide in judgment, such meek ones will he teach his way, *Pf.* xxv. 9. Observe therefore what is made the great condemnation. It is that *Light is come into the world, and men LOVE DARKNESS rather than light. Every one that doth evil, HATETH the light, neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reprov'd or discover'd.* He either never enters himself into, or turns himself out of Christ's school. Tho' we cannot bring the light we come for; yet we may come to the light. And our refusing to come, or being weary of coming unto him, (who is the true light that lighteth every one (is ready to do it) that cometh into the world;) this is our fault, our crime, and what makes us worthy of death. Our part is with the cripple that *Peter* restored, to look on Christ, and to give heed unto him in all his teaching ordinances. This is well-doing; let us not be weary of it; we shall reap, if we faint not. We shall, in his strength, be enabled
to

to rise up and walk. His Truth shall set us free.

2dly, It is an encouragement to repentance, or to a penitential confession of sin. Our Lord commands his disciples to repent, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand: and tells the Jews, *Except ye repent, ye shall perish. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; says Solomon; but who-so confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy: And, as with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, so with the mouth (saith Paul) confession is made unto salvation**. Of such importance is a penitential confession of sin.

But now, what is repentance, or a penitential confession of sins? It is not to groan, with a galley-slave, under the chains of a tyrant; it is not to tell God, it was our forefather only that eat the soure grapes: but that his *childrens teeth are set on edge*, is a meer hereditary distemper, without their fault or crime; it is not to rake into the ashes of our dead grand parent, and to call all our iniquities his; it is not to say, the man which thou gavest to be our root and head hath defiled us, and we are defiled: As Adam in another instance complain'd, *The woman which thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat*. This is all shuffling off the guilt to another. No; repentance, or

A penitential confession of sin lies chiefly in a self-aborring, self-judging, self-condemning act of the soul; so foolish was I, and ignorant; I was as a beast, before thee^v. The guilt and the shame we must charge upon ourselves, and abhor ourselves in dust and ashes, because of them. And what a motive to the duty is it, to stand convinced in our own breast, that our ma-

* Rom. x. 10. y Psal. lxxlii. 22;

nifold rebellions are not only contrary to a divine law, but our own *proper act*; that we were not *merely* moved by another, but our own movers; drawn away of our own lusts and *enticed*, not *pressed* into the devil's service, but *voluntiers*. The consciousness that we have abused the liberty we *had*, and are filthy for want of the grace, we *might* have had, makes our sin exceeding sinful, and is an argument for pious sorrow.

For the *will* to aspire to be *independent*, and to be its own rule; when it was made under law, and capable of obedience: For it to treat the commandments that are holy, just and good, as bands and cords, and to break them and cast them from her; preferring, by a voluntary act of her own, chains to generous liberty: such a view of sin will let us into the plague of our own hearts, and make us very criminal in our own eyes.

Whereas were we destroy'd by another hand only, and no help obtainable; we may lament our infelicity, and rage at the authors of our misery: but all godly sorrow and repentance unto life is shut out. Whilst we look upon ourselves under the laws of *necessity*, and compelled by force; we shall reckon our irreligion and disobedience to be a *name* only, and no more blame-worthy in us, and punishable, than the irregular movements of a watch, or strikings of a clock, whose motions are directed and caused by *necessitating springs*, or by *weights* or *wheels*.

3dly, This conviction is a cherisher of *hope* in God. Great things are said of this grace in scripture. * *It is the anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.* * *Every one that hath this hope in him, (speaking of that hope which hath the great privileges and offers of the gospel for its object) purifieth him-*

* Heb. vi. 19. * 1 John iii. 3.

self even as God is pure. So that it is of vast importance to be rooted in this grace.

But now what a motive is it to make God our hope, to be deeply convinc'd, he has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth? That his arms are open, and all things are ready on his part? To be fully persuaded, Christ will in no wise cast out those that come? *That if the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and will turn unto the Lord; he will have mercy upon him, he will abundantly pardon?* That if we die, God is resolved the fault shall lie at our own door? What made the prodigal entertain hope in his distress, but the consideration that all this calamity was from himself; that if he would return to his duty and to his father's house, he might depend upon bowels of compassion there? *I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.* His hope in his father, takes encouragement from hence: his own folly was the source of all those miseries, and the cause of their continuance; and not any want of love or tenderness in his father. And was he not right in his conclusion? *When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and said, this my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.*

Whereas if we conceive, that God has got an advantage over us by our first parent's fall, and is resolv'd to improve it against us: that all the offers of the gospel are only to tantalize us, to amuse us with false pretences of love; to cast the odium of our destruction upon us, whilst he himself delights in our death: If we persuade ourselves, it was never in his thoughts to put us under so much as a possibility of salvation; this must cut the sinews of all rational hope in God. We shall in-

• Luke xv. 17, &c.

wardly

wardly despond, and draw back thro' a heart of unbelief: saying, To what purpose is it to wait upon the Lord? There is no hope.

4thly, It is a motive to divine love. Love to God is the better half of our religion. ^d Master, what is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to the querist, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and the great commandment.* Nay, it is the source and spring of all true love to our brethren, ^e Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten. This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, loveth his BROTHER also. ^f On these two commandments, or rather on the first of them, ^g doth hang all the law and the prophets. Of such importance is this grace of love.

Now to conceive of God as *willing* to help us in our undone condition, as offering in his son, a remedy suited to our malady, is a powerful motive to love. ^h We love God, because he first loved us, so that the more we perceive of God's love towards us, the more argument and inclination we shall have to love God. Now herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be a propitiation for our sins. He never appears in a more lovely view, than when we conceive of him in this light, as so loving the world, as to give his only begotten son for them. Say but that God gave not his only begotten son for sinners, or (which amounts to the same) that he gave him upon terms, that it is impossible for sinners to comply with; and you stab the divine love, you strip it of its most amiable attractive beauties, and invigorating rays.

God is loveⁱ, and the more we believe and contemplate it, the more constant and flaming will our love be. But then it must be a love that looks

^d Mat. xxii. 36, 37, 38. ^e 1 John v. 1. ^f — iv. 21.
^g Mat. xxii. 40. ^h 1 John iv. 19. ⁱ 1 John iv. 16.

with a friendly aspect upon our own souls ; or it creates but torment to ourselves, and an alienation from God. *The love of God manifested to the spirits of just men made perfect*, will never excite an holy love in the damned, was it to be preach'd unto eternity before the spirits in prison : it is not fitted for the end ; nor can it be their fault, not to be moved by it.

God's love to sinners is the vital principle of obedience ; cut the sinews of love, and you leave the soul feeble and unactive ; it cannot move towards God in any holy subjection to his commandments. But now, the love that is not willing to be communicated, to come within the reach of the object that needs it ; that flies from our touches and embraces, is rather hatred than love, and can never be a *rational* ground for love in us. The love of God in such a light is but another name for indignation and wrath ; and creates only tribulation and anguish in the soul that beholds it. Ten thousand times better not to know that God is lovely, and would fill a soul with eternal beatitude, was he enjoy'd ; than to know at the same time there is an *impassable* gulph between my soul and the enjoyment. And yet if there be not one in a thousand, perhaps in ten thousand, that are the objects of the divine love, and an impossibility of obtaining it in the rest : The poor sinner will see a thousand, or ten thousand arguments to one, against believing there is any love in God towards him, without a belief of which, it is impossible to love God.

5thly, It is a friend to *humility*. One of the great duties of the christian calling is, to ^k walk *bumbly* with our God. Which, amongst other things, lies in a deep sense of our *sinfulness* and *unworthiness* : Of our *sinfulness* ; *The publican stood as far off, ^l and would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a*

^k Micah vi. 8. ^l Luk. xviii. 13.

SINNER. Of our unworthiness ; I am NOT WORTHY of the LEAST of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewn unto thy servant ^m.

Now, a consciousness that we have destroy'd ourselves ; that our sin and our ruin might, by offer'd help, have been prevented, makes sin to appear our own, and so to be exceeding sinful, even the very scum of naughtiness. To disrobe my soul *myself* of all its divinest beauties, or (which is the same) to refuse this celestial clothing, and to be my own eternal enemy ; to chuse death before life, to be a rebel rather than a subject, to chuse to be a traitor rather than a son ; a child of wrath rather than an heir of God, carries such a sting, and so much shame in it, when we take a close view of our conduct, that nothing can tend to abase us more.

Whereas, if our destruction is from another only ; if the sinner may stand up and say, that tho' he be a slave, yet the fault is not his own : he has nobly contended for holy liberty, and has not been wanting to invoke the divine aids. If he can truly whisper to his soul, should'st thou be damn'd, 'tis thine infelicity rather than thy sin ; the bell is of another's kindling ; 'twas never put to thy fair choice, whether thou wouldst die or live : Was the case thus, the arguments for self-abasement, for judging and condemning himself, would be strangely weakned. He would rather be inclined to turn his complaints upon God, as an hard master, than turn inward upon himself, with shame and self-confusion. But to a people that stand convinc'd, the sin that eventually destroys them is their own, Ezra's confession would not be difficult : ⁿ O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God ; for our iniquities are encreased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers we have been in a great trespass

^m Gen. xxxii. 10.

ⁿ Ezra ix. 6, &c.

unto this day : And for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests been delivered into the hands of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. The conviction that the sin that doth eventually destroy us, is our own,

6thly, Is a friend to patience. How does St. James exalt this grace ! ° My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations ; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. He makes patience alone to be an ample reward for all their sufferings. Therefore he exhorts them to see, that patience have her perfect work, that they might be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

But now, what a mighty motive is it unto patience, to consider, that our sufferings are the fruit of our own doings, and that we are filled but with our own devices ? That the rod which chastises us, is of our own making ? *We will bear the indignation of the Lord, says the prophet, because we have sinned against him* °. So, wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin ? We have but little reason to complain of our trouble, since our own wickedness corrects us ; the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord, Prov. xix. 3. Have we destroy'd ourselves, so far as we are actually destroy'd ? Then let us not complain. Instead of *repining*, we ought to be *repenting*. The language of one under this conviction, is rather, It is of the Lord's mercies I am not consum'd, because thy compassion fails not.

Whereas one that can shift off the blame to others, his soul is impatient, foams against heaven, is uneasy with every cross, troubles his own house, and his own flesh, and cannot rest. The prophet therefore, to bring the Israelites to a bearing temper, argues at large with them, that their own ways were unequal ; and that their own iniquities had found them

° James i. 2, 3, 4. ° Lam. iii. 39.

out. *I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his OWN WAYS, saith the Lord God: ^a repent and turn yourselves from all YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.* This conviction,

3dly and lastly, Is a spur to *endeavours*. We are every where called upon to be *very active* in the affair of salvation; to STRIVE to enter in at the strait gate; to cry after saving knowledge, to lift up our voice for understanding, to SEEK her as silver, to SEARCH for her as for hid treasure; to WORK OUT our salvation with fear, &c.

And it is a great motive to *endeavours*, that nothing can *eventually* destroy us but *our own neglects*; that we are not with devils lost beyond help and hope, doom'd to inevitable perdition: But ministers have authority to proclaim *liberty*, ^c to offer liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison unto them that are bound. What shall we be *accessory* to our own ruin; nay, *principal* in shedding the blood of our *own souls*? Doth God say unto me, deliver thyself from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom? And shall I sin the more because grace abounds? This, if any thing, will dispose us to make religion our business, and to do it with all our might; to take to it as our constant and our chiefest business; to pray with fervency; to hear with attention; to live with circumspection; to redeem our time; to improve our talents; to be very serious and diligent, active and zealous: lest for being wicked and slothful under such animating prospects, we be cast, with the unprofitable servant, into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth for ever.

But if we apprehend ourselves to be *so dead*, that there is nothing for us to do, that we *might live*; ^a it will enfeeble, nay break the very springs of action, and betray us into a *passive stupidity*. Diligence is now interpreted as an affront unto the spirit, an

^a Ezek. xviii. 30. ^c Heb. ii. 1. ^e Isa. lxi. 1.

invading

invading of his prerogative, and presuming upon our own strength. We flatter ourselves we give glory unto God by an *unactive* waiting; and that it is our duty to stand still, and see his salvation, before we come to the red sea of difficulties, before our strength fails us. But what says *Solomon*? 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. For behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

So much for the *importance* of the doctrine. In the treating of which head, I have endeavoured, not only to bring in further light and evidence for the *truth* of it, but also to obviate several objections that might arise in our minds against it. Shou'd any still argue, that to put *all* that have the gospel, under a *real possibility* of salvation, is to leave the number of the saved *unfixed*, and *uncertain*, what may be encreas'd or diminish'd at the sinner's pleasure; and so seems to strike at the unchangeableness of the divine decrees, and foreknowledge: I answer; these being points that have created uncommon perplexity to the christian world, and being of a very abstruse and difficult enquiry, deserve a more particular and accurate examination; and which I design for this reason as the subject of one or more future letters: where it may be proper to enquire, whether the divine *mind* doth know any more of the *actions* and *fates* of an *unmade* world, than the divine *will* has decreed concerning them? And whether the *actual fall* of angels and men, with all the *sinful* and *miserable* effects of it, was any object of God's *eternal* and *decretive* will?

S I R,

Your most Faithful Humble Servant,

S. F.

THE
GREATNESS
OF THE
DIVINE LOVE
VINDICATED, &c.

LETTER III.

SIR,

I have gone thro' the *truth* and *importance* of the doctrine, viz. *That we all in our fallen state need sanctifying and saving help; And that this needed help may be obtained by us.* The grand objection against the *truth* of it, is taken from hence; it seems (some may say) to leave the number of those that shall be saved *uncertain* and *precarious*, and so to *clash* with the received doctrines of God's *universal, absolute decrees* and *foreknowledge*; and thus to introduce an *opinion* very *injurious* to the *simplicity, independency* and *sovereignty* of the *divine being*. Give me leave, therefore, to *premise* a few things, before I speak directly to the objections themselves. And here I would observe,

1st, That there is a sort of *infinity* both in *truth* and *error*. The *relations* that arise out of, and the *deductions* that flow from either of them, are *various*, and *endless*. Such positions that, at *first sight*, may appear of little *significancy*, shall, when pur-

sued thro' the *many windings* and turnings they are capable of, prove to be of the *utmost weight*, or the *most dangerous tendency*. To judge therefore of the *importance* of any *sentiment*, be it true or false, it is not enough to consider it abstracted from other things, and separated from all its consequences; but the *pregnancy* and fruitfulness of its nature must be remembred; and what valuable truths or pernicious errors a mind of deep reason and penetration may *truly* draw from it. This observation is just with respect to the sentiments we form of *human nature*, and much more when *God himself* becomes the subject of our meditation. I wou'd observe,

2dly, " That truth is immutable, and always
 " consistent with itself; and no one truth whatever
 " can be prejudic'd by the knowledge of any other
 " truth. Truth can never hurt any good cause,
 " but the more truth we know, the more will any
 " good cause be promoted by it. " Hence the com-
 mand is, *Prove all things* 1 Thes. v. 21.
 " The apostle's precept is universal. It is direc-
 " ted to private persons, and concerns every man
 " whatever. And the trial or examination which
 " he enjoins every man to make, is to be extend-
 " ed to every thing in religion; to all points what-
 " ever, both of doctrine and practice. There are
 " no restraints to be put upon it, nor any limits
 " set to it. The *sacredness* and *importance* of any
 " subject cannot exempt it from this trial. On the
 " contrary, the more important any matter is,
 " the more reason there is, why we shou'd think
 " freely, and satisfy ourselves fully about it. Mat-
 " ters of religion ought not, of all others, to be
 " taken upon trust. In a business of such high im-
 " portance, we cannot use too much caution and
 " deliberation. There is nothing, wherein we are

1 Thes. v. 21.

“ more concerned to see with our own eyes, and
 “ exercise our own reason and understanding; be-
 “ cause it is here that our greatest interest lies at
 “ stake: and if thro’ a wilful neglect of using our
 “ own judgment we fall into a wrong way, it may
 “ lead us to our eternal ruin ”.

“ He that will chuse a religion for me, and will not
 “ suffer me to chuse for myself, ought to be punish-
 “ ed for me too, if I miscarry thro’ his choice ” *.

And this right to *prove all things*, is not the pecu-
 liar claim of some certain *divines* of the *established*
church only, who may possibly in some things have
 departed from the sentiments of the past age; but
 is contended for, by our *dissenting brethren* also e-
 ven of an *orthodox belief*, as the very *distinguishing*
principle of Protestantism. “ Reflecting upon this,
 “ [*i. e.* upon the avow’d principles and practices
 “ of the Papists] I can’t but rejoice (says Mr. —)
 “ in the wonderful mercy of God, in delivering
 “ these nations from such anti-christian dominion,
 “ and in restoring to us the uncorrupted word of
 “ God; and that NECESSARY foundation of ALL re-
 “ ligion, a liberty sincerely and impartially to exa-
 “ mine the grounds of *every thing* which bears the
 “ name of *truth*: and conformably to its evidence,
 “ to our understanding, to determine our conduct
 “ in regard to God and men, without being over-
 “ aw’d into one particular scheme by the terrors
 “ of this world, and the denounc’d anathemas of that
 “ to come ”. I wou’d observe,

3dly, That “ the consequent of this discourse in
 “ order to conscience is, that no man lose his
 “ peace concerning the controverted articles and
 “ disputes of Christendom. If he inquires after
 “ truth earnestly as after things of great concern-

* Dr. Ibbot’s sermons, p. 12, 127. 249. * Mr. — confession
 &c. bound up with Mr. Hill’s ordination sermon, and Mr. Rey-
 nolds’s exhortation, p. 57.

“ ment; if he prays to God to assist, and uses
 “ those means which are in his hands and are his
 “ best for the finding it; if he be indifferent to
 “ any proposition, and loves it not for any con-
 “ sideration but because he thinks it true; if he
 “ will quit any interest rather than lose a truth; if
 “ he dares own what he hath found and believ’d;
 “ and if he loves it so much the more, by how
 “ much he believes it more conducing to piety
 “ and the honour of God, he hath done what a
 “ good and a wise man shou’d do; he needs not
 “ regard what any man threatens, nor fear God’s
 “ anger, when a man of another sect threatens
 “ him with damnation: For he that heartily en-
 “ deavours to please God, and searches what his
 “ will is, that he may obey it, certainly loves God;
 “ and nothing that loves God can perish”.⁷ But
 4thly, Tho’ no *truth*, in regard unto the God
 of truth, ought ever to be deny’d or dissembled,
 whether it relates unto the creator or the creature:
 yet the truths that command our *special zeal*, in de-
 fending or propagating, are such as afford a *shield*
 and a *lustre* to the loveliness and love of God. The
 business of the law and the prophets is to engage
 our love to him. Now the bands which God wou’d
 draw us by, are the cords of his *own love*. What-
 ever truths therefore look with a friendly aspect
 upon the amiableness and amity of the divine
 being, are an help meet for the work, are valua-
 ble for the end they move towards, and ought for
 that very reason to be infinitely precious to us.
 But as to other points, which, tho’ true, run into
 sheer *speculation*, have no *benign* influence (percei-
 veable by us) upon the hearts and practices of men,
 with respect unto their God; that represent the di-

⁷ Taylor’s *dubitor dubitantium*, or the rule of conscience, p.
 755. v. 10.

vine being no more *lovely* nor *loving* than before, nor furnish us with any one argument to imitate those endearing characters of deity: such truths deserve a proportionably *less* zeal. And to lay out our time and strength and warmth in them *only*, may be found at last to be righteous over much, and one sovereign way to destroy ourselves.

What has been observ'd concerning *truth*, will hold of error also. Tho' no error, was it only in resentment against his kingdom which is founded in darkness, ought ever to be own'd or countenanc'd: yet all errors are not equally dangerous, nor equally worthy of our frowns and opposition. These errors whose coming is, after the working of satan, with all deceiveableness of *unrighteousness* that tend to make us unrighteous unto God or man, to stab our love to the objects of love, particularly to him that is so infinitely lovely; those errors that cast water upon these holy flames, and bring a pining consumption upon the very *vitals* of our religion; that alienate our minds from the love of that truth, which is according to godliness: these are errors indeed; but which do sometimes call for the *courage of a lion*, the *wisdom of the serpent*, and the *innocency of the dove*, to contend with.

But let us come with a disciple's temper, with a willingness to *learn*, or to be *unlearn* what we have learned wrong. I will not say, you cannot err, whilst you are thus humbly desirous to *know*, and *do*. But this I am sure of, you are not *so likely* to err; nay, it is *morally* impossible you shou'd err *eventually* in matters that affect your salvation. You shall know that truth which shall make you *free*, free from *sin* and *hell*. According to our Saviour's promise, *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* Let us wait therefore at Christ's school in the use of all the means of knowledge; and

and let us not be afraid to open our eyes and see.
The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek
will he teach his way.

*Take all into thee, then with equal care
Balance each dram of reason, like a potion.
If truth be with thy friend, be with them both ;
Share in the conquest, and confess a truth.*

Herbert.

Having premised thus much, I return to the objections brought against the *possibility* of our *common* salvation. " It seems, *say some*, to bear hard " upon the received doctrines of God's universal " and absolute decrees, and foreknowledge ; to the " great injury of the *simplicity*, *independency*, and " *sovereignty* of the divine being.

To which I answer,

1st, With respect to the *divine simplicity* ; a mistake here *on the side* of this attribute may, perhaps, appear at first sight, to be a very innocent error. But when your subtle heads, from the concession of an *absolute simplicity* in God, [*i. e.* of the real identity or sameness of whatsoever perfections are attributed to the divine nature,] shall not only reject such distinction and variety, as imply real weakness and imperfection ; but shall argue away all counsel and design, all liberty and choice from God, as if he was in another sense too a *simple being* : (Thus *Spinoza* [an atheist] and others, have argu'd for the *necessity* of the divine actions, say they, " The nature of the deity being *absolutely* " *simple*, God's decrees and ideas can't but be the same " with his essence ; but his essence is confessedly *necessary*, therefore those must be so too. ") Oh, when God, the *sole* author of almost an infinite distinction and variety in creation, shall be dressed up as a being so *undistinguishable* in his own nature ;
that

that any *distinction* in God, *analogous* to what is called *personal* in man, is no more to be admitted (no, not upon the foot of revelation itself) than a downright contradiction: When the *simplicity* of God, I say, is set at variance with his *truth* and *veracity*, and with the Idea of an *all-comprehending* perfection; the notion does now change its nature and becomes important. So that let the doctrine of God's *absolute simplicity* be never so venerable for the *antiquity* of its *tradition*, or for the *number* of its *learned vouchers*; yet every one is concern'd to examine for himself, by what authority, either from *revelation* or *reason*, it claims our assent and credence. So,

2dly, As to the *sovereignty* of God; whilst it remains an object of *meer speculation*, to screw up the idea of the divine sovereignty unto an excessive pitch, may seem an harmless mistake. But when the weak christian shall grow *giddy* with the contemplation, and shall dare to affirm, that because God does not always give an account of his matters *now*, they are not to be accounted for, even where the eternal fates of men and angels are concern'd: That because his judgments are unsearchable by our *weak reason*, they are sometimes *contrary* to the *clearest* and *truest* reason: When they shall represent his *sovereignty* as a *boundless*, *unfixed* thing; as if it had a power, at will and pleasure, to dispense with his *moral perfections* themselves; when they shall suck out the very life and blood, the glory of his other peerless excellencies, that they might swell this single attribute to a monstrous size: When it is thus, the error begins now to look with a threatening aspect: and it is high time to tell them, that the perfections we are call'd to *imitate*, such as the divine holiness, and justice, his goodness and truth, are as possible to be known by his creature, as those that are *inimitable*.

imitable ; of which number the sovereignty they ascribe unto the deity may justly be reckon'd one. It is high time to bring them back unto the law and to the testimony ; to compare spiritual things with spiritual ; and to restore the land-marks, that every attribute may have its *own*, its *due* ; and that the glory of *no one* attribute may be maintain'd at the expence and to the eclipse of the rest.

What has been said of the divine *simplicity* and *sovereignty* may be observ'd with equal reason, concerning God's *independency* and *fore-knowledge*. Concerning,

3dly, His *independency*. It may look very specious to heap hyperbole upon hyperbole, one lofty expression upon another, in honour of this attribute. But when the very *decrees* of God, that are *free* in their own nature ; that are conducted *by* and dependent *upon* wise and holy counsel ; and that may consequently be either *absolute* or *conditional*, *eternal* or *not eternal* ; either the *one* or the *other*, just as it makes most for his infinite *wisdom* and *holiness* : When these very decrees, I say, (not one excepted) shall be all put under the same *necessity* of being strictly absolute and eternal, as the divine essence itself : When some shall cowardly give up the *counsel* and *purity* of God's decrees, their proper glory, in complement to the idea of ABSOLUTE independency : And when in consequence of this, they shall dare to assert, That *free agents* (who are to be judged according to their *free actions*) are, millions of them, doom'd to eternal misery, not only before their existence, or the existence of any creature, but even without a respect to their *free* determinations ; nay, that they are *not free*, but by an absolute decree are determin'd to sin and damnation both : When the case stands thus, these speculations become important ; and it behoves us to examine well the ground upon which such notions stand,

stand, before we tenaciously adhere unto them. Lest it shou'd appear at last, that the liberty, with which God intended to endue *thinking* beings, should be a liberty wholly incompatible or inconsistent, in its very nature, with such *absolute* decrees, and so positive a providence, as governs *natural* things, and this *material* world.

For, (to use the words of the late reverend bishop Burnet) "It is hard to suppose two *contrary* wills in God, the *ONE* commanding us our *duty*, and requiring us with the most solemn obtestations to do it, and the *OTHER* putting a certain [*or sure*] bar in the way, by *decreeing* that we *shall* do the *contrary*. This makes God look as if he had a *will* and a *will*: Tho' an *heart* and an *heart* imply no good quality, when applied to men. The *one* will requires us to do our *duty*, and the *other* makes it *impossible* for us *not* to *sin*. The *will* for the good is *ineffectual* [*and weak*] while the *will* that makes us *sin* is *infallible* [*and strong*]. These things seem very hard to be apprehended; and if they are received by us as originals, upon which to form our own natures, such notions may make us grow to be *spiteful*, *imperious*, and *without bowels*; but do not seem proper to inspire us with *love*, *mercy*, and *compassion*; tho' God is always proposed to us in that view." ^a

Or, (as the learned and pious Mr. Howe expresses it) "It may well be thought sufficient to save the rights and privileges of the first cause, to assert that no action can be done but by a power derived from it; which in reference to forbidden actions, intelligent creatures may *use* or *not use* as they please; without over-asserting, that they must be *irresistibly* determin'd also, even to the *worst* of actions done by them. Besides, that it seems *infinitely* to detract from the perfections of the ever-

^a Vid. His exposition of the 39 Articles. pag. 160.

“ blessed God, to affirm he was *not able* to make a
 “ creature, of such a nature, as being continually
 “ sustain’d by him, and supply’d with power every
 “ moment suitable to its nature, should be *capable*
 “ of acting; unless whatsoever he thus *enables*, he
 “ *determine* (that is, for it can mean no *less* thing, *im-*
 “ *pel*) it to do so.

“ And unless it was affirm’d *impossible* to God to
 “ have made such a creature, (that is, that it im-
 “ ply’d a *contradiction*, which certainly can never be
 “ prov’d) there is no imaginable pretence, why it
 “ should not be admitted he *hath done it*: rather
 “ than so *fatally* expose the *wisdom, goodness, and righ-*
 “ *teousness* of God, by supposing him to have made
 “ laws for his reasonable creatures, impossible thro’
 “ his own *irresistible counter-action*, to be obser-
 “ ved: And afterwards to express himself dis-
 “ pleas’d, and adjudge his creatures to eternal pu-
 “ nishment, for not observing them.”

And he wonders, “ That a matter whereupon all
 “ *moral* government depends, both *human* and *divine*,
 “ should not have been determin’d at first sight.

“ The notion of the goodness and righteousness of
 “ God, methinks, *says he*, should stick so close to
 “ our minds, and create such a sense in our souls, as
 “ should be infinitely dearer to us, than all our *sen-*
 “ *ses* and *powers*. And that we should rather chuse
 “ to have our *sight, hearing, and motive power*, or
 “ what not besides, disputed, or even torn away
 “ from us, than ever suffer ourselves to be disputed
 “ into a belief, that the *holy* and *good* God should
 “ *irresistibly determine* the wills of men *to*, and punish
 “ [them *for*] the same thing.”

“ But the efforts of a sophistical wit against *sense*,
 “ and more against the *sense* of our *souls*, and most of
 “ all against the *intire sum* and *substance* of all *morality*
 “ and *religion* at once, are but like the attempt to
 batter

“ batter a wall of brass with straws and feathers.

“ For I would, *adds he*, appeal to the quick refined sense of any sober and pious mind, after serious, inward consultation with itself; being closely urged with the horror of so black a conception of God [that he should be supposed irresistibly to determine the will of man to the hatred of his own blessed self, and then to exact severest punishments for the offence done] what relief it would now be to it, to be only taught to reply, [that man is *under the law*, and *God above it*.]

“ A defence that doubles the force of the assault. What! that God should *make a law*, and *necessitate* the violation of it! and yet also *punish* that violation! And this be thought a sufficient salvo, that himself is not subject to any law! Will a quick-scented, tender spirit, wounded by so insufferable indignity offered to the holy God, be any whit eas'd or reliev'd, by the thin sophistry of only a collusive ambiguity in the word [*law*?] which sometimes signifies *the declared pleasure of a ruler to a subject*, in which sense, any eye can see, God can be under no law, having no superior. But not seldom also, *an habitual fixed principle and rule of acting after one steady tenour*. In which sense, how manifest is it, that the perfect *rectitude* of God's own *holy, gracious* nature is an *eternal law* to him, infinitely more stable and immutable, than the ordinances of day and night. But to proceed,

4thly, The same observation will hold with respect unto the **FOREKNOWLEDGE** of God. Tho' it may seem an error of the right hand, and very pardonable, at first view, to extend this attribute beyond its *proper object*; to make it to comprehend, not only all things that do exist in their *remotest causes*, and are therefore *truly foreknowable*; but to comprehend also those

↳ *Vide Mr. How's Treatise of God's Prescience, pag. 35, to 42.*

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things that have as yet *no cause* of their existence in being, neither in the *creature* nor in the *Creator*; and which by consequence, are at present *only possible*, and *not future*, and therefore are in this state no real objects of the divine *foreknowledge*, which always supposes its object to be something, that not only *may be*, but *will be*: tho', I say, such a mistake may appear less dangerous at first; yet when men shall argue from God's eternal *foreknowledge* of sin, as *future*, to his *decree* of sin; and from his decree of sin, to his being the *real author* of sin; nay, that *sin ceases* to be sin; or at least, to be the sin of the *creature*: When they shall, in consequence of such a boundless *foreknowledge*, represent the divine being as *requiring* of angels and man before their fall to *stand*, without giving them a *power* to stand; and resolving to punish them with eternal torments, only because they were not *too mighty* for their maker, could not break thro' the chains of his unchangeable decrees; and were not able to do *something* with *nothing*: When things are brought to this pass, it behoves us to *awake*, and to consider, whether the *foreknowledge* of God has not its proper bounds, as well as his *power*: "Whether the
 " introducing an absolute and universal fatality,
 " which evidently destroys [*all liberty, and with it*] all
 " religion and morality, would not tend more of
 " the two to the dishonour of God, than the deny-
 " ing him a sort of *foreknowledge*, which perhaps is
 " impossible [*in its own nature,*] and would imply a
 " contradiction to conceive him to have," [without making him the *author* of the sin *foreknown*.] And whether the denying thereof " would, in this case,
 " be any more a diminution of his *omniscience*, than
 " the denying him the *power* of working *contradictions*, is taking away his *omnipotence*. "

What I drive at is this; since *all men* think it their duty, more or less, to be looking into God's

• Vid. Dr. Clark of the *divine Attributes*, p. 97.

natural

Turn back to 85

natural & *perfections*; and since *some men* are apt to form very strange ideas of them, and to draw monstrous conclusions from them; it must ever be our wisdom to be diligent in our *enquiries* into, and cautelous in our *determinations* about them: to see to it, that we have an *undoubted principle of reason*, or a *sure word of prophecy*, rightly understood, to support us in points, that (tho' they may appear of less importance at first, yet) are of great concern, when view'd in their *distant* and *remoter consequences*; and what very nearly affect the *honour* and *vitals* of our common religion. * THEN shall we know, if we FOLLOW on to know. Let us therefore examine, with unprejudiced minds, whether God's decree of *election*, and his eternal *foreknowledge* may not be explain'd in a way consistent with reason and scripture both, and yet so as to leave the *accountable creature truly free*; and consequently, (if he dies eternally) the *real author* of his own destruction. To begin,

1st. With *Election*. Election, according to the etymology of the word, is out of some (be they more or less) to chuse not all, but some. Not only *persons* but *things* may be the object of this election or choice, i. e. election may relate either unto the *way* in which we shall be happy, or unto the *persons* that shall obtain this happiness.

Election may relate unto the *way* in which we shall be happy. There are two ways which the scripture holds forth, whereby man might be happy; the way of *works* and the way of *grace*. The way of *works* is by man's performance of the law of his creation or law of *innocency*; which if he had performed, his reward would have been of merit or of debt: The way of *grace* is according to the gospel, thro' the redemption which is in Christ Jesus: Of these two ways

* N. B. That *natural here* is not opposed to that which is acquired, but to that which is moral. * Hos. vi. 3.

Alaiqqal

God

God elected or chose the *latter*, as that which (in our present circumstances) tends most to *our security* and *his own glory*: in that his *justice* is only concerned in the former; but in the latter his *manifest wisdom* and *goodness* also.

If it be demanded, when this election of grace, or this divine choice, *that man shou'd be happy in a way of grace, and not of works*, did commence or begin in the purpose of God? I answer, *1st*. It is, perhaps, one of those secret things that belong unto the Lord our God; and not of those things which are revealed. Or, *2^{dly}*. This purpose of God according to the election of grace, we may safely conclude, was as early in the divine mind, as was consistent with his other infinite perfections.

Now the moral perfections of God lead me to conceive thus of the matter. God intending to make the world, which consists of animate and inanimate creatures, he determines at the same time (if we may call that time, which was before all time) among the animate creatures to make man, a middle creature, between brutes and angels, endued with understanding and will. With *understanding* to reflect on himself and his maker, and consequently from what was agreeable to his own nature and God's, to know his duty according to the law of nature: And with *will* to choose or refuse the doing thereof at his liberty; *i. e.* man being to have at his creation a power to act, or not to act, to act thus or otherwise, it was resolv'd he shou'd not be under a necessity, but be left to his own choice, whether he wou'd determine his will, according to the rule or law of his creator, or against it.

Now the very idea of liberty supposing it *possible* that he might *abuse* his liberty and chuse *wrong*; therefore as God determined to make such a creature as might be *happy*, if it *wou'd*, by obeying the law of his nature, or as might *destroy* himself by disobedience; so God purposed at the same time, that the
happiness

happinefs of this creature, upon fuppoſition of his diſobedience, ſhou'd be never more obtainable in a way of merit, but in a way of grace, as what was beſt for fallen man, and his own glory. So that ſtill *Adam* did deſtroy himſelf; God's purpoſe of election according to grace laid no neceſſity upon *Adam* to fall: It was only a *conditional* proviſion of grace in the divine decree, upon ſuppoſition that his free creature ſhou'd make a guilty choice, and fall from the law of his innocency.

Shou'd it be reply'd, then this purpoſe according to the election of grace, or that man's ſalvation ſhou'd be in a way of *grace* and not of *works*, was not an *absolute* but a *conditional* purpoſe, a purpoſe that ſhou'd take place only, in caſe *Adam* fell, *i. e.* upon a condition, that did depend upon the will of *Adam*, whether it ſhou'd exiſt or no. I answer;

If *Adam* had obeyed the law of his creation, (as he certainly *might* have done) then there had been a law given, which cou'd have given life; and therefore (as the apoſtle obſerves) [†] verily righteouſneſs ſhou'd have been by the law; but now, if righteouſneſs or life had been by the law, or by works, (as it *might* have been) it wou'd never have been by grace. For, as if it be by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwiſe grace is no more grace: [‡] So if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwiſe work is no more work.

We muſt have a care of ſetting one decree at variance with another; and of repreſenting the divine perfections as divided againſt themſelves. An election of grace that makes the fall of *Adam* neceſſary, is ſuch a grace or favour, that it wou'd have been a grace or favour to have wanted. It looks more like an expedient to repair and mend the defects of God's own work, than to relieve our firſt parents againſt the folly and wickedneſs of their works.

[†] Gal. iii. 21.

[‡] Rom. xi. 9.

Either God did decree to make *Adam* a free agent, and to govern him as such; or he did not.

If he *did*; then we must never admit any such decree as supposes *Adam* to be a necessary agent, i. e. to be not free. This is to decree to destroy his decree: Or, to decree a thing to be, and not to be at the same time; to be free and not free; *Adam* to be a self-moving principle and yet to be moved by another. 'Tis in effect to say, God purposed that *Adam* shou'd be active in his fall, and yet passive; or, to be both active or passive, i. e. to be active and not active, passive and not passive; to be an agent and no agent. And yet if the purpose of election was not conditional, but absolute, and yet did depend upon the fall of a free agent, whether it shou'd be executed or no, these absurdities and many such like wou'd follow.

But if to maintain the absoluteness of the divine purpose according to the election of grace, any shou'd say, God decreed to make man not a free, but a necessary agent, (which by the way is a contradiction in terms;) then *Adam* did not destroy himself, but God. It was the decree of God he shou'd fall, be under a necessity of falling: and who can resist his will? And then to require him to stand was to require him to do something with nothing; to be another creature than his Creator had made him; to put forth a power he never received: and to punish him for being the workmanship of God. It is to make God to be the author of his sin, to be the greatest, the only sinner in the world; and to render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish unto a creature for no other reason, but because he was obedient to the laws of his creation; or, because he could not change necessity into liberty, was not an over-match for his maker, and did not make himself a better and a nobler being, than the author of his being design'd he should be.

But

turn forward to 89

But did not God absolutely and certainly fore-know how *Adam* wou'd act ; whether he wou'd eat the forbidden fruit, or no, before he did exist ? Now, if his fore-knowledge be absolute and certain, why must his purpose be *conditional* ? I answer ;

Tho', for instance, with God all things are *possible*^b : yet he *cannot* lie, *Titus* i. 2. It is *impossible* for God to lie, *Heb.* vi. 18. He can't make a contradiction true. This wou'd be to make a thing to *be* and *not to be* at the same time. At this rate, a lie may be a truth, a lie and no lie, a truth and not a truth. Therefore the meaning is, all things that are *possible*, God can do. The creature can do *some* things that are *possible*, God can do *all*.

Thus, none will deny, that all things that are *knowable*, God doth know ; all things that are fore-knowable God doth fore-know. But then as it is not knowledge, to know a thing to *be*, that is *not* ; or to be *what* it is *not* ; but error and mistake : so, it is not fore-knowledge to fore-know, that a *free* agent shall not act *freely*, but *necessarily* ; that what God hath decreed shall depend upon the *will* of a *future* creature, whether it shall be or no, shall yet not depend upon the will of that creature, but upon his own will. This is to know things otherwise than they are ; and is *ignorance* and not *knowledge*.

What doth neither exist *itself*, nor exist in *its causes*, is not the object of knowledge, and consequently not the object of fore-knowledge. In such a state it may be known to be *possible*, from the *power* of God, but not to be *future*. The sin of *Adam* cou'd not exist *itself*, before *Adam* himself did exist ; if therefore it existed at all, it must be *in its causes*. But if *Adam* must be the only cause of his own sin ; if it must depend wholly upon his own will and choice ; if it must

^b Mat. xix. 26.

be his own *free* act, and not the *act* of another, it cou'd not exist in its *cause*, before *Adam* did exist; because *Adam* himself, the cause did not exist. It was therefore no object of knowledge, before his creation, no more than a future world cou'd be the object of the divine fore-knowledge, before the cause of its futurity, the divine decree itself, did exist.

If it be said, God *willed* *Adam's* fall, before he *willed* it himself; ay, before *Adam* had a will; and so the *cause* of his fall did exist before him; and his fall was therefore fore-knowable before the existence of him that fell. To this I answer;

1st, How do you know that God *willed* *Adam's* fall, before he *willed* it himself; nay, before his existence? Has God told us so? Point to the chapter and verse, if thou canst. Or, do you learn this great secret from the perfections of the divine nature? Does it bring any revenues of honour to the wisdom or holiness, to the justice or goodness of God, to make a creature, not only that *may* sin, but that *must* sin? And then to punish him for sinning? If *Adam* was determined by the divine being before hand to act only *one way*, and that the *wrong way*; to what end is a rule given at all to direct him; and a sanction annexed to enforce the observance? *The Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou may'st FREELY eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.* Besides,

2^{dly}, If the divine being *will'd* the fall of *Adam*, before *Adam* existed, that his fall might be fore-known; then God's *will* was the *cause* of his fall; and so *Adam's* sin was God's act and not *Adam's*; he was only *passive*. But to *necessitate* to sin is more than to tempt; and yet we are forbid to say, or think, *When*

*we are TEMPTED, we are tempted of God: * For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* But more of this hereafter, when I shall answer to some arguments that may be brought for God's eternal fore-knowledge of the sinful actions of free agents.

The sum of what I have now said is this; the divine purpose to save man in a way of grace, and God's fore-knowledge of *Adam's* fall, whatever is imply'd in them, they did not lay the least imaginable necessity upon *Adam* to fall; that so God's purpose and fore-knowledge might take place. But *Adam* was, notwithstanding, as absolutely free to eat, or not to eat, to sin or not to sin, to stand or fall, as if there had been no such purpose or knowledge at all existing in the divine mind. Or,

If our thoughts must needs wade into the depths of the divine wisdom and knowledge, and precisely determine about God's prescience, it is safer of the two to conclude, that the volitions or actions of *free agents* are not fore-knowable from all eternity, because they are *free*; than to conceive, that their volitions and actions, which were decreed to be *free*, are *not free* but *necessary*, because they are fore-known. God will never thank us to maintain the honour of one attribute, at the expence of another. Or, that we might give more than is due to his *natural* perfections, to detract from his *moral* perfections. We can't think too highly of his prescience or purposes; if his holiness and justice, if his mercy and truth be not injur'd. But as *these* are those perfections that render the divine being the object of our love, our trust, and delightful obedience; so we must be very cautelous, how we admit any fault that shall stab these his most amiable and adorable excellencies, out of a pretended veneration for any other absolute perfection of being. I come next,

* Jam. i. 13.

To the *persons* that shall obtain this salvation. And here election may relate either to the *sort* of persons that shall obtain salvation, or unto the *particular* persons that shall obtain it.

Of the two *sorts* of persons in this fallen world, believers and unbelievers, penitent and impenitent, such as obey and such as disobey the gospel, God has chosen or elected the *former* only unto salvation: the latter shall be punish'd with an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. Therefore it is that the *Jews* are rejected, because they sought to establish their own righteousness instead of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel; which is all one with the righteousness of faith: and the *Gentiles* are called and saved, in seeking salvation only by believing and gospel obedience; it being faith imputed for righteousness, in opposition to the works of the law, whereby we are justified, thro' the satisfaction and merits of Christ Jesus.

Now the doctrine, that we have *destroy'd ourselves*, but in God is offer'd help, does in no wise clash with such an election: nay, it rather establishes it. As *Paul* in another case; *Do we make void the law thro' faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law.*¹ Christ being the author and finisher of faith unto all that come unto him, and being exalted to give repentance and forgiveness; and it being *possible* for all to come; it is owing to a man's own fault that this election takes not place in him; that he is not a penitent believer, and so not of that *sort* of persons, that God hath chosen unto eternal life; or that he is not *effectually called*, and so not of the number of those that are *thus* elected.

But the difficulty lies in the election of *particular* persons: whether the chusing of some certain persons by name, that they *shall* be holy and without blame

¹ Rom. iii. 31.

before him in love, does not render the salvation of those that are not thus chosen *impossible*? i. e. whether it will not follow, that if such *shall* be saved, others *can't* be saved, do what they will or can? And therefore whether it can be truly said, that others on this supposition have destroy'd *themselves*? or, that in God there is any offer'd help for them? I answer,

1st, If *both* can't be true; the question is, which *must* be true? If one of the two be false; the question is, which is false? that we have destroy'd ourselves, both *revelation* and *reason*, and *experience* also, with one voice proclaim: that some certain persons by name are chosen is only pretended to be the language of *revelation*. Now *revelation* and *reason both*, are more than *revelation alone*; and much more, when a man's own *experience* confirms what *reason* and *revelation* dictate. Who is the greatest friend unto this sort of election? One that reconciles it with other doctrines, as plainly revealed as election; or, he that sets them at variance? We say, the Papists confute themselves, who tell us, that if we will believe what we read, the bread and wine in the Lord's supper are Christ's real flesh and blood: whereas our very eyes, that must read this, assure us, the elements are still bread and wine, and not flesh and blood. 'Tis the same here, they appeal to *revelation* to prove an election by name; and from thence infer, the salvation of others is *impossible*: when, if *revelation* be true, the salvation of others is *possible*. Otherwise how do they destroy *themselves*? How is there help for them in God? How can God say to them, *why will ye die*? But,

2^{dly}, Tho' we read of the elect angels, of some that were chosen to stand, "I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, that thou observe these things, does it follow, that those who were not elected, *could not stand*? When God spared not

the angels that *sinned*, " Was this all their sin, that they were not more stedfast than creation had made them? And were they cast down to hell, and delivered into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto the judgment of condemnation, only because they cou'd not do *impossibilities*? Make themselves better than they were made? If the *necessity* of their falling was from God, so was the *blame* of their fall too. Sure, their fault was more than this, not to make brick without straw or clay. Not to exert a power it never had; or, for a creature not to be able to do something with nothing, seems too small a crime to deserve eternal torments. Omnipotence itself *will* never, *can* never do, what it *can't* do: then can it be a fault, not to be stronger than God? And yet this is the consequence if the election of some angels or men, renders the *standing* or *salvation* of others impossible.

3dly, All (I suppose) will allow, that the salvation of others might have been *possible*, if the election of *some* had not prevented. For if nothing *may* be, but what *is*, or *shall* be, then there is an end of all government, whether divine or human. Laws and sanctions, rules, rewards, and punishments, are all a solemn amusement, of no significancy: Then it was not right in *John* to tell the *Pharisees*, *That God was able of these stones, to raise up children unto Abraham*¹; since in as much as he *did not* do it, according to them he *could not* do it.

But if the salvation of others had been *possible*, had there been an election of none; then it must be owing to this election of grace, that the rest of the world are necessarily undone; then it ruins more than it saves, and that, perhaps a thousand times over; then the prince of the power of the air is very much indebted to election, that his dominions are so extensive, and his reign so secure and quiet. Election at this rate

ⁿ 2 Pet. ii. 4. ° Mat. iii. 9.

brings more prey to his greedy and bloody jaws, than all his stratagems and feats besides. It not only puts all the rest of the world within the reach of his cruel paw, but out of the reach of help too; puts them under an *impossibility* of escape. Is this the election that God design'd to the praise of the *glory* of his *grace*? As a display of the *riches* of his *grace*? Where is the *grace*, much less the *riches* of divine *grace* in such an election as this? which yet are characters that are, doubtless, due to the election, which is truly scriptural.

The gospel is a covenant, a covenant of *grace*. This covenant of *grace* is commanded to be preach'd unto all, none excepted. Now let us turn to all the covenants upon record, from *Genesis* to the *Revelations*; and we shall find that the terms of every covenant on man's part (whether the covenant was *personal*, *domestick*, or *national*) were still such as he had either a *present* or *remote* power to perform: There was either help in hand, or help to be had, to do his part. And shall we deny that to the best of covenants, to a covenant of *grace* and distinguishing favour, which is true of all other covenants whatsoever? Election does not at all alter the nature of the covenant; this remains the same; the condition is of *possible* performance.

But then, because in a state of probation and trial, there is a power to refuse as well as to comply, to act or not to act conformably to it; and to a *possibility* that none might accept the covenant: It pleased God to undertake for a certain number in all ages, that they should yield unto gospel terms; that they should be drawn by the *cords* of a man unto a sweet and willing compliance, as a *living* rule unto others, and as an ocular proof of what they themselves might have done; and that as it pleased the father to bruise

the son, and to put him to grief^a; so his soul might not be an offering for sin in vain; but that he might see his seed, see of the travel of his soul and be satisfy'd. Thus tho' sin abounded; (so as to take away a power of being saved by the covenant of works,) grace hath much more abounded: in that it not only restores again a possibility of salvation by a new and better covenant; but does ascertain the salvation of some, who by their pious example do condemn the world, whilst they obtain righteousness and strength in the use of those powers, which others also had, (some in an equal, some in a greater degree) but wickedly abused. As our Saviour argues in another case; *The Queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn them; for she came from the utmost parts of the earth, to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold [not only as great, but] a GREATER than Solomon is here.* *The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, [not only as great but] a greater than Jonas is here.*

The expediency of such an election as this seems evident; in as much as without such an election, it would (as I observ'd) have been possible, that none might have been sav'd after all; and that Christ's blood might have been shed in vain.

But you will remember, Sir, that the election I contend for damns none; that it leaves those that are not the subjects of it, to their free and fair choice, whether they will be saved or no. Nay, whilst it is a privilege to be the subjects of this election, one great design of it is, to secure in all ages examples of pure and undefil'd religion for the benefit and encouragement of others: who are the more powerfully excited to put in for the prize of the gospel,

^a Isa. liii. 10, 11. * Luke xi. 31, 32.

whilst they have before them such exemplary instances of *living piety*; and observe, or are told, the victories these obtain, and the progress that by an active dependance, they, in spite of opposition, do make in undissembled Christianity. For as the *subjects* of election *might* do, (as to points of *duty*) had they not been elected, what election undertakes that they *shall* do; so they are as so many witnesses, of what the world about them, *might be* and *do*, would they but *awake* their *dormant* powers, and *look up*, in imitation of such examples. Thus, what a mighty encouragement was this to the *Gentiles*, tho' sunk into brutality, to hope and trust in Christ for pardon, upon their repentance; when *Paul*, their apostle, tho' such an eminent offender, was such an illustrious instance of pardoning mercy! "Howbeit, for THIS CAUSE, says he, *I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern [viz. of encouragement] to them who should HEREAFTER BELIEVE on him to life everlasting.*

You will observe, I say, that the election I contend for, tho' it puts a *certainty* of salvation upon *some*; yet it puts a *bar* in the way of none: tho' it enables us to say of *some*, not only that they *may*, but *shall* be saved; yet it is never the *less*, but rather the *more true* of *others*, that they *may* be saved. As the non-election of these will not allow us to say, they *shall* be saved; so the *possibility* of their salvation forbids us to say, They *shall not*. This is most certain, that nothing but their own *voluntary* and *free* refusals does shut them out of the number of those that *shall* be saved, and conclude them under condemnation. Nay, our blessed Lord seems plainly to intimate this difference in his discourse to his carnal hearers; that tho' THEY *would not* come unto him, he had those that *would*; or, notwithstanding he had those that *would* come, yet *others* were welcome, and *might* come. *Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: He that cometh to me shall ne-*

ver hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, that ye also have seen me, and believe not; [have so seen me, that ye might believe, and yet believe not.] All that the Father giveth me, SHALL come unto me; and him that cometh to me, (whether of that special number or no) I will IN NO WISE cast out.

But against this doctrine of a *personal election*, or an election of a *certain number by name* to everlasting life, it may be objected; whether such a decree of *election* will not make men *necessarily good*, as much as the decree of *reprobation* makes it *necessary*, that any should be *sinners*? I answer,

If none can be *good*, without being *freely good*, with a freedom of *indifferency*, (as none can be *sinners*, *really sinners*, without being *freely so*) I must confess the force of the objection. Election, I allow, cannot undertake that the creature *shall* do that, which after all must be left *intirely* to the *liberty* of the creature, whether it shall be *done* or *no*. And did the constitution of the gospel-covenant give a title to none but unto those, who are good from such a principle of freedom, the goodness of none could, I own, be *ascertain'd* by the decree of a *personal election*.

But all that is *absolutely necessary* to make any *evangelically good*, I take to be this, that such be *conscious* of what they do, and be *really directed*, and *determined* in such or such actions by the *perception*, *belief*, and *love* of gospel light. But whether it shall be in their *power* to *evade* the *evidence* and *efficacy* of this light which sanctifies, or no, alters not the case with respect to their *right* and *title*. And indeed, if it was not so, *must* not the Infants of believing parents, dying in their infancy, be altogether *incapable* of gospel holiness, and consequently be *deny'd* any right, according to the constitution of the gospel, unto everlasting happiness; and so be left wholly to the *uncovenanted mercies* of God?

But if my account be true, the election contended

John vi. 35, 36, 37.

for

for, may ascertain such a *goodness* as is *necessary* to entitle the *subjects* of it unto happiness; tho' it will leave it *possible*, that this *goodness* may want that *liberty*, which is essential to the *sinful free acts* of the accountable creature. Only when I say, that it is *possible*, that such *goodness* may want this *liberty*, I would not be thought to mean, that there is a *necessity* to want it. No, such *goodness* may notwithstanding be *eventually* their own *free* act. Election only secures God's kind interpositions to bring the *evidence* and their *faculties* effectually together, if needful. Not but that their *praise-worthiness*, and (probably) their happiness too, will be *increas'd* or *abated*, in proportion to the degrees of *freedom* or *necessity* that shall be found in their gospel obedience. The condition of angels and saints in their state of *Confirmation* will serve to illustrate this matter; these, its likely, do still retain a real principle of *liberty*, which consider'd *in itself* may be capable of doing either *good* or *evil*: And so by a *right* and *free* exertion of this principle, they may continue in heaven itself to be subjects in the strictest sense *praise worthy*, and capable of that *peculiar* amiableness that belongs to a *moral agent* walking in his *unconstrained* uprightness; only with this happy alteration in their circumstances, that having pass'd thro' their state of *trial*, they are now entitled to the *eternal watchfulness*, and *conserving care* of the divine Being, should any possible danger arise. Tho' this must be allow'd, that so far as they are at any time actually determin'd by *another*, (should it be by the divine Being himself) and do not freely determine *themselves*; so far they seem to be only *passive*; and so, tho' in such instances their conduct may still bear a real conformity to the law, yet that *peculiar loveliness* and *spirit*, which is to be found in *active* and *free* obedience is wanting.

Thus I have endeavour'd to explain election whether it be of the *way* to salvation, or of the *persons* that shall be saved; whether it be of the *sort* of persons, or of the *particular persons*, that are the subjects of it: I have endeavour'd

red; I say, to explain it in a way *consistent* with it *self*, with the *moral perfections* of God, and with such like expressions in scripture, *O Israel, thou hast destroy'd thy self; but in me is thy help*. And having laid down what I take to be the counsel of God in this matter, I submit my thoughts to the candid and judicious.

My labour on this head may, 'tis possible, be *unacceptable* to some. But this is my apology, it is a task that has been in a manner forc'd upon me by others in the defence of the gospel, which they seem willing to *inclose*, or *nullify*: whilst they represent it as an offer made *sincerely* unto some few, they know not who; unto others in *appearance only*; and even unto both, upon terms *impossible* to the creature, without such help as the *latter cannot* obtain, and the *former know not how* to obtain: and all to gratify some darling and contradictory opinions about *universal and absolute* decrees.

But wou'd they not affect to pin themselves down to absurdities that they cannot answer, by laying down their own peculiarities, which are either precarious or false, as *principles*; wou'd they not do this; the *enemies* of the *doctrine itself*, wou'd (I am persuaded) be *fewer*; the *scandal* of *explications* wou'd be *less*; the *dignity* of the *gospel offer* wou'd appear *greater*; the *sinner* be *more inexcusable* and *self-condemned*; and the *encouragements* to *strive* to enter into the *kingdom of heaven*, wou'd be *more convincing* and *persuasive*. So much for the *decree of sin*.

I shou'd now have discuss'd the *other head*, viz. of the *divine prescience of sin*; and have examin'd, what there is in the doctrine of God's fore-knowledge, that militates against the *possibility* of our *common salvation*; but this must be the subject of another letter: I am, Sir,

4 OCT 58

Tours in great Sincerity,

S. F.

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